

THE DEAD SAILOR

AND OTHER STORIES

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BY



SIR J. C. ROBINSON

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PREFACE.

THE three first in order of these stories are a sample of many, mostly forgotten tales, invented and told offhand for the amusement of the writer's children and friends. The children are now grown men and women, and there are even children's children on the scene. Some of the guests who heard the stories told are widely scattered now ; others, alas ! have passed away. This publication will, at all events, recall to many friends pleasant memories of former days—of an old country house by the sea, of fair girls and music, of infinite young men's doings and talk ; of Oxford and Cambridge and the schools, of yachts and guns, the scent of flowers through mullioned windows, the cawing of rooks at noon and eventide, and the ceaseless murmuring of the near-at-hand

waves. The last story was written after a visit, some years ago, to a notable country mansion, where, *comme de raison*, there is a haunted chamber. Unfortunately, however, the ghost, whether by its own or other people's fault, had, as regards its history and particular supernatural status, fallen out of memory. Whose ghost it was, and why it went on appearing, nobody could tell. The writer undertook, thereupon, to supply from his inner consciousness, name and circumstance to the local habitation of the waning shadow.

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THE DEAD SAILOR.

THE parish books of Trimingham, in the county of Norfolk, show that the Rev. Thomas Coe was rector of that parish in the year of our Lord 1724, when the occurrences about to be narrated happened there. If the things in question had not happened, or rather if a dim recollection of them had not still lingered in the neighbourhood, that commonplace, inoffensive old country parson would probably have been by this time as completely forgotten as any particular cow or sheep reared in his parish, and in due time brought to an end. The poor man doubtless, in the fulness of time, went to his grave in his own churchyard, but there is no tombstone to mark the spot where his bones lie, if indeed they continued to lie, for, strangely enough, in his time Trimingham was the scene of

some extraordinary resurrectionist proceedings. Why, wherefore, by what power promoted, or to what intent, nobody could find out, and certainly now nobody will ever discover. The strangeness of the doings in question, to say the least, provoked infinite wonderment and speculation at the time. If, when the facts are before the reader, they should dispose him to consider why such things should have happened at Trimingham, of all places in the world, or why so insignificant a person as its spiritual pastor should have been singled out as a prominent actor therein, the present narrator can give no satisfactory answer; he could only reply by citing other seemingly quite objectless chances. As regards this poor parson's election as the hero of a story, one might indeed perhaps just as well speculate as to why some particular little fly was singled out for enshrinement in eternal amber untold ages ago, whilst myriad million other flies in the world perished in their day, leaving no more record of their brief existence than the changing sunbeams which shone on their gilded wings.

Little need now be said touching the per-

sonality of the Rev. Thomas Coe. At the period in question he was a bachelor of about sixty, the incumbent of a rather poor living, where he occupied the rectory house, which adjoined and jutted into the churchyard. His establishment consisted of his housekeeper and servant-of-all-work, a hard-featured, hard-handed, hard-working, and sour-tempered female of about his own age; and a boy, who looked after the pony and did everything else there was to do. The latter, however, had his quarters in the village, not under the rector's own roof.

Something must now be said about Trimingham, its position, and surroundings. The principal factor of position—for it cannot be called a "surrounding"—was, or rather is, the cold North Sea, for Trimingham is a coast village at the very edge of a sandy cliff, which is daily and hourly mouldering away under the ceaseless lashings and undermining of the waves.

"Trimingham, Gimingham, Mundesley, and Trunch, all four lie in a bunch"—so runs the local distich. Two of these villages, however, Trimingham and Mundesley, will not lie where they do for an indefinite period, for the sea

is even now threatening to eat them up bodily, as it has indeed engulfed so many other villages and hamlets on this coast. The other two lie further inland, but the day will come when even their places will know them no longer, for the sea some day or other, and within measurable time, will have dissolved and washed away all this part of the country. The particular part where, in perilous vicinity to the enemy, still stands Trimingham, is just at the most salient part of that particular big round swelling lump or knob, looking at the map of England, which forms the county of Norfolk. All the soil and under strata of the district are loose friable sand, with a narrow ridge or backbone of chalk running through, which juts into the sea as a bold headland a mile or so to the south of Trimingham. The rapid waste of the cliff betwixt Trimingham and Mundesley, indeed, is the cause of the wide-reaching and dangerous sands and shoals of Hasborough and Yarmouth, further south. There, in fact, the foundations of new land are being laid with the materials of an old country. Trimingham and Mundesley lie about three miles apart on the coast, and, by the way, North Walsham

must not be forgotten, for it has to do with our story. North Walsham, then, is the little local capital, the market town of the district, and it stands about four miles inland, directly opposite to Mundesley. The road from Trimingham to North Walsham lies along the top of the cliff parallel with the sea as far as Mundesley, and then takes a sharp turn inland towards the former place. At low water there is a wide sandy beach under the cliff, practicable for vehicles even at some states of the tide; but, as I have said, the road runs along the top, and quite close to the edge of the cliff. It is, indeed, constantly being formed and reformed, for in parts the friable soil often falls in great cantles, carrying entire stretches of it bodily away. Probably, indeed, no part of the roadway over which, one night in November, the Rev. Thomas Coe slowly jogged along in his old pony-chaise on his way home from North Walsham to his house at Trimingham now exists.

It was a Saturday night about nine o'clock. The reverend gentleman had been to North Walsham early in the afternoon, on general and also on particular business of his own.

His general business was to call at the Barley Mow, one of the hostelries with which North Walsham literally swarmed, then, as it does now. Some petty requirements at one or two of the shops and a call or two on friends in the town, but more particularly a gossip with neighbouring parsons and farmers at the Barley Mow, all of whom found the ineffable dulness of country life wonderfully lighted up and relieved by these gatherings, were the ostensible cause of this journey, which, indeed, took place pretty regularly all the year round on the same day of the week. A more particular reason there was, however, on this occasion, which was why the worthy parson came in his pony-chaise instead of on the back of his faithful animal, as was his wont.

North Walsham is one of the nearest English towns in a direct line to Holland. For ages before, Norfolk and the low countries over the sea had maintained more or less intimate relations. At the period we are speaking of, however, these relations had very much dwindled down, and the once legitimate active communications and trade betwixt one coast and the other had degenerated to little

better than smuggling, the principal commodities being the strong waters and tobacco of the continent. Nowhere was Dutch schiedam—"hollands," as they called it—more highly appreciated than in the county of Norfolk, and nowhere was it to be had in greater purity and abundance than at North Walsham. Every North Walsham Boniface—and, as it has been intimated, they were a numerous tribe—was either a smuggler or a receiver. Now, the Rev. Thomas Coe had a certain liking for good hollands, and mine host of the Barley Mow had from time to time supplied him with not a few kegs of the precious fluid, and at the particular date of our story there was one such, warranted of a very especial brew, awaiting him at North Walsham.

The night was wild and inclined to be stormy, so the worthy parson started on his journey home with the precious keg somewhat earlier than usual. The road was heavy, and so was the lumbering old chaise, and the steed was slow and plodding. The road betwixt Mundesley and Trimingham ascends and descends a good deal, for the cliffs vary very much in elevation ; at one point, indeed,

as the road approaches Trimingham, they rise to the height even of a hundred or a hundred and fifty feet. The road itself was but a sunken track in the sandy soil, continually being deepened by the wear and tear of wheels and hoofs and the rain wash. For the most part it was only wide enough for the passage of a single vehicle, but it had occasional widenings out for passing places. In the narrow parts it was often closed in on both sides by high banks matted and topped with briars, stunted alders, and hawthorn and maple bushes. Occasionally, moreover, gnarled and strangely contorted scrub oaks had essayed to grow, in spite of the fierce salt-laden sea-blasts, which flattened them down and turned all their branches landwards, as if a continuous heavy weight had pressed upon their summits.

Scant at the best of times was the foliage of these trees, and mainly on the under side of the branches, and by this November-tide only a sparse clothing of dry and rustling leaves remained. The matted twigs and branches, however, were thickly intertwined, and in some places, where a number of trees had sprung up together, their horizontal branches

formed almost a continuous roof or covering over the narrow sunken road. To one of these spots at the very highest part, about half a mile from Trimingham village, faithful Dobbin, the pony, had laboriously dragged his master with the precious keg, and was probably turning over in his equine mind the near prospect of a good feed in his warm stable, with a day of blessed rest afterwards; for Dobbin's experience had run for well-nigh twenty years in precisely the same groove, and he knew quite well that Saturday and North Walsham were, so to speak, convertible terms, and that the next day would be Sunday. That the good beast knew every inch of the road goes without saying. He needed, then, no guidance nor any urging on, for he was always quite as eager to get home as his master. The latter, at the point of our story at which we have arrived, was more than half asleep; the reins were held mechanically in his hand, and he only occasionally woke up when some particularly heaving jolt, or some especial side-long lurch occurred, as the wheels found their way from one deep rut to another. The vehicle had but just emerged from one of

these tree-covered stretches of roadway, and was progressing more smoothly than usual, when all at once the parson was sharply aroused by a sudden and abrupt stoppage, the shock of which well-nigh pitched him head over heels on to his horse's back. What in the name of wonder had happened? There was no other vehicle in front, no sound of wheels, and, so far as could be seen at the first glance, nothing in the way. The parson's rather angry expostulation with his beast at this unusual conduct, and even a touch of the whip, produced only a negative effect, for the poor animal slowly but most resolutely began to back down the road. Turn he could not, for there was not width enough. Clearly there was some impediment, something ugly in the path. The rector's slumbering faculties were all at once aroused ; something was the matter, and, whatever it was, it had to be faced and got over. Fortunately it was not pitch dark ; a waning moon shone faintly out occasionally in brief intervals, when thick masses of cloud, succeeding each other, scuddled wildly across her sickly disk. One of these luminous intervals happened at the very moment, and by its aid was revealed some-

thing black lying across the road a few yards in front. The parson was frightened, and so was his horse; the poor beast, indeed, trembled and shook in his harness. But what was there to cause the alarm? The black thing, whatever it was, lay perfectly still; there was no sound but the rushing of the wind through the rustling leaves of the stunted oak trees in the rear. Frightened or not frightened, however something had to be done. Not an inch forward would the horse budge, although his master tried in vain to urge him up to the sinister impediment. Finally, there was nothing left for it but to descend and reconnoitre—the lion in the path must be got rid of somehow or other. Slowly, step by step, and with his stout ash stick held before him, the Rev. Thomas Coe advanced towards the dreadful blackness. Something instinctive told him what it was, and there was little doubt but that the horse had formed the same conclusion. It was a dead, not a living man, for as the parson paused to scan it carefully, a stillness of death brooded around the body; not a movement or a breath was there.

The parson had seen many dead men, he

had buried not a few, and he was not altogether a man to lose his wits in a wild panic about nothing in particular, but it must be said that he was now scared. All at once a strange misgiving came upon him that this was no common case, but that something dreadful lay behind it. Slowly he advanced listening, but there was no sound of breathing ; the man was not dead drunk, but stone dead.

To thrust him out of the path and hurry home as fast as possible was the only plan. How the parson ultimately effected this, as he said afterwards, he hardly knew, but at last he did so by prising the body on with his stick, and pushing it with his feet. Look at it he scarcely dared, but a frightened glimpse or two showed him that it was the corpse of a man in a common sailor's dress, drenched with wet. The road once opened, it needed no exhortation to spur Dobbin onwards ; the good beast went on at a rattling pace, as if the evil one were at his heels, and not many minutes elapsed before he arrived steaming and all in a lather at his journey's end. It must be said that his master was in a very similar state, for, as he said afterwards, he had scarcely a dry thread about him for the mortal fear which

had fallen on him ; and yet, as he said, what had really happened, on the mere face of it, was not enough to put man and beast into such a fright.

Being Saturday night, the Trimingham folk had not yet all of them gone to bed. There was still a full gathering at the Red Lion, but it was not to that quarter that the parson addressed himself in the first instance. His right-hand man, in short all Trimingham's chief man, was Farmer Dobbs, churchwarden, overseer, etc., etc., the most authoritative and substantial person in the parish. The rector was on the best of terms with him. Farmer Dobbs's house was in the village, and thither the parson drove, instead of to his own home, which, however, was close by. Farmer Dobbs was at the Red Lion, where, as a recognized leader of men in a small way, he was discussing the weather, the crops, and the last news from Norwich, with a select circle of friends and neighbours in the snug little sanded parlour of the hostelry, whilst another and more numerous gathering of the commonality occupied all the seats and settles in the kitchen. In the midst of all this, an incoherent but imperative message from Mrs.

Dobbs caused no little excitement amongst the assembled company, and the farmer hurried home forthwith. Any mishaps to Farmer Dobbs or the parson were matters of general concern, and the brief explanation as to the cause of alarm which the messenger was able to impart served, at all events, to excite in the assembled company instant manifestations of sympathy and eager curiosity. Mugs and tankards were forthwith hastily emptied, the long clay pipes thrown aside, and every man at the Red Lion, landlord included—who, good man, had an eye to the reassembling of his guests in case of false alarm—sallied out after Farmer Dobbs, and made their way to his house forthwith.

Already half a dozen hangers-on around the door were eagerly speculating as to what had happened to the parson on the road home. Highwaymen, a whole posse of witches on broomsticks, a murder before his face, leastwise a ghost or an apparition of the devil himself all blazing with brimstone, are samples of the suggestive horrors with which the newcomers were instantly assailed. The rector's horse and chaise were still standing at the door, and the good man himself and the farmer,

followed by three or four farm labourers with lanterns, soon made their appearance. On the parson's direction, a move was instantly made towards the cliff road, and explanations were hurriedly given as the entire party, now numbering thirty or forty persons, went along. The crowd, being a numerous one, was pot-valiant, and pitch-forks and flails were in a good many hands. Witches, at all events, would have been pricked and buffeted, and even Satan himself might have felt the flail rattling about his ears and horns. It was thus with considerable disappointment that nothing more formidable than the body of a dead sailor, lying at the side of the road, was to be found.

Eager scrutiny from forty pairs of eyes was soon brought to bear on the carcase. The lanterns enabled it to be overhauled in the fullest detail, and they showed the corpse of a man of some five and thirty or forty years, in a seaman's dress, one article of which—his breeches—revealed his nationality. He was a Dutchman, a commonplace, stout, squat fellow, with a vulgar, repulsive countenance. The entire body was sodden with sea-water, which oozed and trickled from its garments

as it was turned over and examined. There was nothing whatever in the man's pockets, and no clue or indication of any kind as to why or how the corpse had been so strangely deposited in the middle of the Trimingham road. Some indication of violence there seemed to be, for the man's head and face were a good deal bruised, and the hands and knuckles were cut and abraded; but these injuries might very well have been caused in the turmoil of a shipwreck, and it was evident that the body had been in the sea perhaps a week or more. Living Dutch sailors, the counterpart of this man, had often been seen in the neighbourhood of Trimingham; nor, indeed, was he the first who had been found in a defunct condition. Amongst the miscellaneous flotsam and jetsam of this dangerous coast similar unprofitable *trouvaille* only too frequently made its appearance. There was an outlying corner, indeed, in Trimingham churchyard, where from time immemorial such unwelcome visitors were bundled underground, usually with little ceremony or concern.

To find such a corpse, however, on the high cliff road was quite another matter, and

there were circumstances touching the time and place of its deposition which at the first blush rendered the matter mysterious and inexplicable. The cliff, for a mile or more quite up to Trimingham village, was on the average at least one hundred and twenty feet high, scalable with difficulty only in two or three places by zigzag paths. To ascend after dark, especially if encumbered with the heavy burden of a sodden corpse, seemed almost impossible, for in the day-time even, and to those accustomed to climbing, they were dangerous, owing to the friable nature of the soil and clay, which, especially after rains, often gave way in great rolling masses. Incautious people, indeed, had actually been almost buried alive in this way. Clearly the body could not have been brought up from the beach close by ; it must, then, have been conveyed along the road, carried, by hand or in a vehicle, either from or through Trimingham town, on the other side of which there was an easy road up from the beach, or else from the direction of Mundesley, where there was an equally easy approach from the sea. But the difficulty was that, by whatever way it was brought up, it must have been deposited

only a very short time before the rector came upon it—a quarter of an hour or so at most, for more than one vehicle had gone from Trimingham to Mundesley, and the occupants had passed the rector on the road with the usual kindly good night, without a syllable being said as to any dead sailor in the way. This it was which so completely upset the poor parson himself at the moment of his discovery. On the other hand, if the corpse had been carried through the streets of the village, or if any suspicious vehicle containing it had passed through them, it could not possibly have escaped notice. It seemed, then, as if the body had been literally dropped from the skies, a special crux for the good people of Trimingham. All this passed more or less quickly through the minds of the assembled villagers, and the effect was peculiar. The hustling and crowding of the first moments were succeeded by an immediate shrinking back, and an evident movement towards going home. The proposal of Farmer Dobbs and the parson, that the corpse should be forthwith removed to the village, met with no response, for nobody could be induced to touch it. Finally it was left where it was for that night.

The march home again was quicker and more tumultuous even than the advance, for a sudden panic seized on the crowd, the babble of voices and contradictory opinions was suddenly hushed, a general stampede ensued, and there was a positive struggle in the narrow road not to be hindmost in the race.

The company at the Red Lion did not reassemble that night. Every man went home as speedily as possible; wives and daughters, open-mouthed and eager, had to be informed and horrified in their turn. All Trimingham passed an uneasy night, for in every household there was excited discussion and speculation, often prolonged into the small hours of the morning. Various indeed, and for the most part wild and gruesome, were the more or less silly theories formed to account for the deposition of the corpse in the unlikely place where it was found. On the whole it was generally concluded that witchcraft, in some shape or other, was at the bottom of the business. Trimingham people and their neighbours were firm believers in witches and all kinds of ghostliness. The particular hypotheses which in the morning gained most support were two, and they each had their

eager advocates. It is well known that in the arcana of witchcraft the corpses of dead people were essential items. Anointing with dead men's fat rendered the witches invisible, and severed hands, the stiffened fingers converted into corpse-candles, were universally efficacious; locks and bolts were in vain to keep "the hand of glory" out. Witches then, riding on their magic broomsticks, had conveyed the dead man from the sea, and, perchance overweighted or discovered at some critical moment, had suddenly dropped their ghastly burthen on the spot where it was found. The rival theory was essentially not very different, but in this case it was the devil himself, or some one of his imps, who had conveyed the man. Again, it was an undoubted fact that the ghosts of some people, vampire-like, often returned to or lingered in their dead bodies after death; for some unholy purpose the devil perhaps wanted this particular man's ghost. Satan, then, had flown away with the carcase, and, having either drawn the ghost out of it or discovered that there was none in it, had pitched it down as useless lumber not worth carrying further. The further development of this story will, however, I think, show that

this last opinion was wrong, for in the long run there seemed to be a considerable amount of latent energy remaining in this dead body.

The corpse was removed early on the Sunday morning and deposited in one of Farmer Dobbs's outhouses, where, during the day, before, between, and after church services, the dead sailor may almost be said to have held a posthumous levee, for every man, woman, and child in Trimingham flocked to see the all-engrossing object of their thoughts. Nothing more, however, could be made out about it than had been revealed in the brief inspection of the night before. It was everybody's conviction that, if the dead man's story could be told, some strange and awful instance of unheard-of devilry would be made known ; but there was a horrible fascination even in the very silence of death. Although there was obviously nothing new to be gathered, many of the most superstitious and imaginative inhabitants returned again and again, in the vague expectation that repeated inspection of the body might perchance, after all, reveal some shreds at least of evidence in confirmation of one or other of the more or less wild and improbable theories which were

flitting through their minds. Little heed had been given to the parson's sermon, or the Prayers or the Psalms even, that day, for every head in Trimingham Church, capable of putting two and two together, was literally filled with the one subject of the dead sailor. The day was wet and stormy, but when darkness fell early upon the scene on that November day, the thing was different, and Trimingham itself soon wore a most silent and sepulchral aspect. Not for the world would any one have ventured near the corpse after dark, and the hinds who had to look after the farmer's cows in the shed adjoining that in which it had been deposited, when they had done their work for the night, hurried home as if Satan himself were behind them.

The Red Lion was almost deserted, for there was a general scare, and a vague sense of dread made every man's own fireside the most suitable and comfortable place as the night came on. Moreover, the endless debate which had gone on during the day had almost thrashed the matter out.

Monday ushered in the week with its round of simple occupations, very much of the same unvarying nature as they have been ever since

at this lone Norfolk village ; but of all the Mondays in the memory of man before, and certainly of all the Mondays since, this particular one was destined to leave behind it the most conspicuous mark in the Trimingham calendar. "Events" never occurred at Trimingham ; nothing really worth recording was ever known to have happened there. The pages of its simple archives, the Church register, from that time to the present, are burthened by scarcely any other record than that of the births, marriages, and deaths, which testify to the continuity of the human race in that part of the world.

Wild unsettled weather, which had prevailed for some days past, developed as morning broke into a furious gale, with an almost continuous deluge of driving rain. Trimingham village at the best of times was not a particularly cheerful place, and in such weather it was scarcely possible to imagine a more uninviting locality. There would not have been much evidence of life in the place on such a Monday morning if it had not been for the one all-absorbing subject of interest, but the customary restraints of the sabbath being at an end, and outdoor work, owing to the bad

weather which prevailed, virtually suspended, speculation and controversy broke out again with redoubled force. There was a matutinal gathering at the Red Lion of an entirely unusual nature, and a great deal of running about and gossiping from house to house. On Farmer Dobbs, the churchwarden and overseer of the parish, and on the parson, devolved the onus of getting rid of the unwelcome guest who had so strangely come on the scene. It was decided to bury the dead sailor forthwith. All the examination and debate had failed to convey any more definite or certain information as to the strange circumstances of the case, than had been revealed at the first moment of the discovery of the corpse. The man had evidently met his death by drowning in the sea, and it had never been the custom in the Norfolk coast villages to have inquests held in such cases. Everybody was anxious that the uncanny carcase should be put underground as soon as possible. The village carpenter then was ordered to make a rough coffin of deal boards, and the sexton to dig a grave. These preliminaries, however, took up some hours, and it was not till three or four o'clock in the

afternoon, in the normal darkness of a November day, augmented in dreariness by the wildness of the weather, that the interment was effected. As may be imagined, and in particular under all the circumstances of the business, both the necessary and unnecessary assistants at the hasty ceremony were anything but inclined to loiter on the spot after it was over. The sexton and his helper were of this mind, and after a foot or two of earth only had been thrown on the coffin, the further filling in of the grave was postponed till a more convenient season. Mother earth, at all events, had taken to her bosom one more of her children, and the man and his mystery were, to all seeming, irrevocably put away and relegated to that dread day, when all secrets shall be revealed and every burthen put on the right shoulders.

It is needless to detail all the *pros* and *cons* of the numerous confabulations which passed betwixt the parson and his coadjutor both before and after the funeral. They were prolonged in the evening, over more than one tankard of hot ale by the fireside in the farm parlour, and it was nine or ten o'clock before the worthy clergyman made his way back,

amidst the wind and rain, which had gone on increasing, to the shelter of his own dwelling. On such a night, and with the by no means cheerful preoccupation of the recent event on his mind, it was excusable to still further fortify the inner man before retiring to rest. The keg of hollands had been already broached, and, with a steaming jorum of the comforting fluid and a bright fire in his snug study, the rector resigned himself, after dismissing his housekeeper for the night, to a further pondering on things in general. The rector's ponderings, however, were not entirely of a self-satisfying nature. More than one glass even of the grateful cordial failed to suppress some uneasy qualms and reminders, to the effect that the liquor had not been quite honestly come by. The occurrence which had so completely upset both himself and his flock, seemed to connect itself by more than one moral, if not material thread, with this particular keg of smuggled hollands. The dead sailor himself was precisely the kind of man whose trade it was to bring over such commodities. Who knows whether he might not in some way or other have had to do with this especial keg? Smuggling was a

wild, rough business, and ugly things not infrequently happened in its pursuit. One thing was certain—if the parson had not gone to North Walsham to fetch the keg, he, at all events, would not have stumbled on the dead sailor in the Trimingham road. Vague and confused reminders of this kind, then, were passing through the good man's mind as he sipped his hollands and blew a cloud from his long clay pipe, and on the whole their effect was unsatisfactory. There was a slight bitterness in the cup of comfort he was quaffing.

Meanwhile the gale outside had become a perfect hurricane. Long swelling blasts and thundering gusts seemed enough almost to uproot the house and cast it bodily into the sea, whilst the driving rain rattled like shot against the window-panes. Beyond and in dreadful unison was the turmoil of the waves, grinding on unceasingly like the drone of some vast and horrid musical instrument. Crash after crash the furious blasts struck the house, startling the rector out of his reveries; but at last another sound became quite unbearable and called for abatement. The rector's servant had locked the house

door and retired for the night. The usual fastening of the door, however, was an ordinary iron latch, and the furious wind, driving through the opening which gave it play, produced a loud unpleasant rattling, just as if somebody was impatiently working the latch up and down, clamouring for admission. This again startled the poor parson. He had never heard anything of the kind before; perhaps the wind had never before blown so furiously from the same quarter. It was in itself a most disquieting, unbearable sound. The cause, however, was evident, and at last the good man bestirred himself to stop it. To insert a peg of wood in the opening was the obvious remedy. The rector lit his lantern and went to the door. A slight inspection, however, showed that the operation had to be performed from the outside. He stopped short, for a sudden presentiment took possession of his faculties. What if it should really be somebody trying to come in, some ghostly visitor, some diabolic messenger of evil? For a moment the man was appalled with a vague sense of dread. He would, perhaps, have been stout enough under other circumstances, but a beneficed clergyman who had

lent a hand in defrauding the king of his revenue was no longer in his normal state of cleric potentiality.

He had, however, come to the door with a purpose, and, although with some trepidation, he proceeded at last to unbar and unlock it. At the very instant that he at last placed his finger on the rattling latch, a furious gust of wind blew the door open with a crash, and, astounding to relate, a heavy lumbering body of some kind or other, which seemed to have been propped against the outside of the door, fell into the passage with a dull thud. The parson was thrown off his legs, his lantern blown out, and a wild blast swept through the house with a wailing shriek, which a cry of terror from the parson rendered additionally appalling. It awoke the frightened housekeeper from her first slumbers, and when her master fled wildly upstairs to his own room alongside, the resultant scare may be more easily imagined than described. What it was that fell into the house the parson divined in an instant by a kind of intuition rather than by actual sight of the object—it was the dead sailor again!

The rector kept a big watchman's rattle in

his room, and when he opened his window casement and proceeded to rouse the village with this portentous instrument, and when the terrified housekeeper, although in the dark as to what had occurred, and perhaps for that very reason all the more alarmed, also rushed to her own window and set up a loud hysterical screaming, the effect of the gruesome concert was prodigious. It was not long in rousing up the neighbours; the gale itself had perhaps kept many of them from their slumbers, and ere long a hurried but rapidly increasing crowd made their way towards the rectory. That the house must be on fire, was the first impression. Not so, however, for all was dark within; but the obstreperous clamour which proceeded from it without intermission showed that there was something very unusual the matter. The earliest comers then, though literally in the dark—for they had had no time to light their lanterns—made their way in a body to the house door. This, to their surprise, they found wide open, and, groping their way in, the leading man stumbled and fell over the body on the floor; whilst several of his eager companions, crowding in

after him, met with the same mishap. Instantly a panic as sudden and complete as that which had stricken the inmates of the house seized upon them all, an ignominious retreat ensued, and no one remained to listen to the parson's cries and expostulations from the window.

Farmer Dobbs himself was by this time up and stirring, and with two or three of his labourers, carrying lanterns, hurried to the scene of action. The first batch of frightened rescuers was met on the road, but it was not a time to wait for explanations, if even the scared and discomfited rustics could have given any intelligible account of the cause of their retreat. Most of them, however, returned with the newcomers, now in a position to throw light on the cause of the disturbance. As they approached the house, a hasty and confused volley of questions and answers was exchanged with the rector, who had locked and bolted himself in his chamber, and still kept his post at the open casement. Was it fire, burglars, witches, ghosts? What was the cause of the hubbub? All the parson could do, however, was to ejaculate in a frantic and

incoherent manner, "The door, the door! Take him away; for the love of heaven, don't leave me here with him in the house!"

When Farmer Dobbs and his troop actually came upon "him" lying athwart the threshold of the house, as the flickering lights disclosed the dark and soddened corpse which had already been the cause of so much perplexity, and lit up the scared faces of the crowd, seldom, perhaps, has a more weird picture met the eye, or a more astonishing problem presented itself for solution.

It is needless to describe the hubbub, the outcry, the confusion of tongues, opinions, and wild counsels which followed on the first stupor of astonishment. The gathering was rapidly increased by fresh-comers, for the village was now thoroughly aroused, and the motley half-dressed crowd numbered very few absentees. That diabolic agency, not human hands, had raised the pestilent intruder from his grave, and again planted him under the nose of the Rector of Trimingham for his especial annoyance, was as clear as noonday to every mind. The terrified parson and his housekeeper were soon induced to descend; but their incoherent explanations threw no

light on the matter, and the upshot was that the corpse was dragged out and deposited some distance away outside. There was nothing else to be done with it during that stormy night. A proposition to sit up and keep watch with the rector was received in dead silence; nobody volunteered for the office, and finally the parson and his house-keeper took shelter with their friendly neighbour the farmer. The house was locked up, and in a few minutes every excited assistant at the sudden muster was again housed under his own roof. For the remainder of that eventful night Trimingham had very little repose; the dead sailor had banished sleep. Ghostly horror brooded in every household; the wildest theories and exaggerations previously floating about were held to have received the amplest confirmation, and there probably was not a single person in the village clear-headed or sceptical enough to argue that, after all, human hands might easily have lifted the half-buried carcase out of its shallow grave and conveyed it to the parson's door without any risk of observation on that tempestuous night.

The rector's story next day, when he could tell it in anything like a collected manner, received, it must be said, some slight embellishments from his own excited imagination. It was retailed and repeated one to another by every man and woman and child in Trimingham and its neighbourhood. Like Jonah's gourd, it grew fast and furious, and with astonishing rapidity a portentous legend, infinitely varied in detail, roused up the whole country-side. In the course of the morning hundreds of eager and excited visitors flocked into Trimingham from every adjacent village, and at last the magnates of the district, squires and magistrates, and even doctors and lawyers from North Walsham and Cromer, arrived on their nags or in their lumbering chaises, to learn the real truth of the matter on the spot. To the cooler judgments of these worthies, as they cross-examined the various actors in the drama and discussed its points amongst themselves, although the occurrences were remarkable enough, and indeed inexplicable on any reasonable supposition, there was nothing in them necessarily indicative of supernatural agency ; and the sensible advice there-

upon given to the Trimingham authorities was, that they should bury the man again, but this time well and securely in a grave deep enough, and with special precautions adapted to defeat any further attempt at hasty exhumation in the night. This reasonable recommendation, although by the crowd in general it was considered quite inadequate to the requirements of the very astonishing case, was then forthwith carried out. Hundreds of eager and excited spectators flocked together in the churchyard from all parts of the country-side, and waited patiently hour after hour, watching every spadeful of earth thrown out by the grave-digger and his helpers, at the same time discussing the *pros* and *cons* of the matter with infinite zest and with the wildest scope and latitude of imagination. The grave was further excavated in the light sandy earth to a depth of fifteen feet or more. The corpse, amidst the intensest excitement of the surrounding multitude, was then deposited in it, this time without any Burial Service, for the ceremony had been already performed on its first interment. After a foot or two of earth had been thrown in upon it and

well stamped down, several heavy baulks of old wreck timber were let down into the grave and carefully adjusted, so as to interpose an obstacle, as it was deemed, quite sufficient to defeat any attempt at furtive exhumation—at all events, by human hands working necessarily during the course of a single night. “But Lord bless you,” opined more than one oracle in the surrounding crowd, “where is the good of wreck timber against the devil and his angels?” The early darkness and a fresh outbreak of pelting rain and wind, however, ultimately dispersed even the most obstinate and excited on-lookers. Finally the work of filling in the grave was effected by the village authorities alone, working in relays, but it was not till after midnight that the work was completed, and the mouth of the grave carefully sodded over. Considering all the circumstances, to set a watch over it for the first few nights would have seemed the natural course, but the precautions taken were obviously sufficient as against human agency, and even the most notorious dare devils in Trimingham one and all shrunk from the suggested task, and the intention of mount-

ing guard, though mooted, was necessarily given up.

Now, all considerations of reasonable probability would seem to indicate that at this point our story should be brought to an end, and the inclination of the present narrator runs strongly in that direction. The portion of the history which remains to be told is, however, stranger than that which went before; but whether the further events in question really occurred or were a legendary embellishment of an after-time only, the writer feels bound to give them, and the more so as they are gravely recorded in exactly the same literal and even tediously circumstantial manner in which the entire story from the beginning is set down by the original chronicler. With regard to this original source of information, the writer should perhaps have explained at the outset that it is a sort of *procès verbal* or rambling narrative, compiled, some forty or fifty years after the events occurred, by a succeeding Rector of Trimingham, evidently from conversation with still-living witnesses—old men and women of the village. Here, however, it must be observed that these witnesses must have one and all been mere children

at the time, and that the legend had evidently, in the lapse of years and by endless repetition, amplification, exaggeration, and distortion, acquired a confirmed supernatural character, which no one thought of questioning. The wildest and most improbable variations of circumstance, in short, were evidently in current circulation, and had gained implicit credence on all hands. There is, indeed, a suggestive indication of this state of matters in the original manuscript account, which, I ought to say, is preserved in the chest in Trimingham Church, along with the parish registers. The original compiler notes the fact that the entry in the register of the interment of the dead sailor suggests that it must have been the final and conclusive settlement of the matter, for there is no record or hint of any subsequent exhumation or further trouble of any kind. This, however, may perhaps be accounted for on the supposition that the entry in question was made by the parish clerk in exactly the same perfunctory manner and brief terminology in use in all other cases, directly on the completion of the second funeral, and that he never afterwards received orders from his superior to vary it or add anything to it.

As has been already intimated, all that had happened up to this point of the story admits of natural explanation ; the events in question, though very extraordinary and unprecedented, were not necessarily miraculous, but this cannot be said of what remains to be related. In short, if the further incidents of the Trimingham story actually happened, it would seem impossible to account for them on any natural hypothesis, and a character of supernatural ghostliness would inevitably attach to the entire record. Of course, if the dead sailor's advent had been nearer our own time—that is, if it had occurred at any time during the famous resurrectionist scare which prevailed in all England for many years in the early part of this century, the abominable doings of Messrs. Burke and Hare, or some local emulators of their odious fame, might have accounted for a great deal, but the Trimingham business happened a full century before any such doings were thought of. The idea, moreover, that some inveterate jokers of the "Tom and Jerry" school (which, by the way, was also in the womb of time) had taken so much trouble simply to amuse themselves and mystify the good people of Trimingham, would have

seemed at the period indeed infinitely more improbable even than any theory of a supernatural cast, and it was evident that no such idea was ever entertained.

The readers of this story, then, must accept it and form their own judgments upon it for what it is worth. My part is simply to dress up in a presentable literary garb the events which I have found set down in a somewhat rambling, inconsequential, and dry matter-of-fact manner, and I shall therefore proceed exactly in the same style as before, without further circumlocution.

The stormy weather which had prevailed for so many days on this bleak Norfolk coast showed as yet no signs of abatement, and morning broke with little improvement on the wild tempestuous night of the interment. At seven or eight o'clock, one of the Trimingham fishermen, who had been down to the beach to see to the safety of his boat drawn up on the sands, came running back into the village, scared and breathless, with a piece of news in his mouth which seemed to cap all that had gone before. As soon as he could reply to a score of eager questioners, the man informed his auditors that the first thing he

saw lying on the sands close beside his boat was nothing less than the corpse of the dead sailor, which they had interred with so much ado the day before—"At all events," he added, "it is as much like him as one pea or one egg is like another." In a very few minutes all Trimingham was apprised of this fresh development, and hurried down to the beach, and there sure enough lay, still and stolid, the selfsame incomprehensible carcase. There could be no mistake; everybody had seen it before and scanned with eager eyes every point and lineament of the man and his simple equipment. If it was not the individual himself, it was some astounding *alter ego*—his brother, mayhap, or perchance a diabolic simulacrum put into shape by the devil and his imps. In any case, the business was at last growing serious indeed. When was this visitation of dead sailors going to stop? The Trimingham people had already had more than enough of it—their simple wits were at last completely obfuscated; and their tempers were also tried. What, however, was to be done with this pertinacious corpse? Clearly these visitations must be brought to an end somehow or other. Curiosity, in any case, was

stronger even than indignation, and it soon occurred to everybody to rush off to the churchyard, and take note of any possible disturbance of the newly completed grave. There, to their utter astonishment, however, they found everything exactly as it had been left. The very men who had worked so late averred, indeed, that not a sod had been moved from the position in which it had been well fixed and trodden down.

It is astonishing how quickly the rumour of any extraordinary event spreads itself abroad. The news of this last act of the Trimingham drama was communicated with almost telegraphic quickness to the neighbouring villages, and the assistants at the previous day's operations speedily came trooping back again, their number augmented by a fresh contingent of wonder-stricken gossips. The plot had indeed thickened ; there were now apparently two Dromios in the field ! It is no wonder, however, that, in spite of the apparent certainty, the necessity of verifying the fact by conclusive investigation became evident to every mind. The general conviction was, indeed, that some fresh piece of devilry had been performed in the night, and that, in some un-

accountable and miraculous manner, the self-same carcase had been spirited out of the grave in spite of all physical impediments. It was a rooted article of belief that witches, ghosts and vampires frequently emerged from the grave for various purposes of hellish requirement. The devil had been often known to "draw" men's souls out of their living bodies, and why should he not be able to draw their dead carcases through wreck timber and churchyard mould?* Be it as it may, it was very soon decided to reopen the grave and ascertain by actual examination whether or not the body was still in it. The "claimant"—for such for the moment he must be held to be—was very soon brought up from the beach and deposited on the top of a tombstone close by. We are now coming to the climax of

* To Oxonians of former generations, the story of the little window in Brasenose lane will be called to mind in proof of the truth of this opinion. There once upon a time, as is well known, a benighted undergraduate saw a dark figure steadily pulling a man—wire-drawing him, in fact—through the narrow opening betwixt the iron stanchion bars and the stone mullion of a ground-floor window, whilst a hideous clamour proceeded from the room within, and, on quickly running into the college to the room in question, the frightened witness found that a young man had just at that moment expired in an apoplectic fit, in the midst of the wild orgies of a "Hell-fire Club."

this history, and I begin to feel that a more graphic pen than mine, aided, indeed, by the ready pencil of some practised pictorial illustrator, would be needed to do full justice to the scene which ensued.

A crowd numbering some five or six hundred persons soon congregated in the churchyard. To such a pitch had the general excitement attained, that the slow process of reopening the grave was followed with almost breathless interest ; every spadeful of earth thrown up, indeed, was watched by eager eyes as if the humus of past generations could itself reveal the secret of the grave, and every mouldering bone thrown out was scanned with the intensest interest and curiosity. Ropes and tackle were required to raise the heavy baulks of wreck timber, and when at last by their help these impediments were one by one slowly hoisted to the surface, the suspense became almost unbearable. A frantic eagerness to learn the result seized upon every assistant ; a surging mob crowded round the mouth of the grave, and it was not without difficulty that those in front kept themselves from being precipitated into it by the pushing, scuffling crowd behind them.

There remained yet one heavy piece of timber, and there were a couple of men in the grave standing upon it, occupied in adjusting the rope for its removal. Suddenly, however, it gave way beneath their feet, for there was neither coffin nor dead sailor beneath. A wild cry of terror and dismay, and a sudden scuffling at the bottom of the grave made itself heard. The effect on the onlookers, as may be imagined, was appalling. The two men emerged more dead than alive; mortal fear had fallen upon them when they discovered that there was no corpse underneath the timber, and the simultaneous endeavour of each man to raise himself to the surface by the same rope had led to a momentary conflict of the most desperate nature betwixt them. Clearly there was but one dead sailor, and the unwelcome visitor of the morning was the selfsame intruder. The conclusion was astounding, but there was no resisting it. Unless the sodden tongue and swollen lips of the dark and silent corpse could have been made to move again in speech, there was no explanation of the mystery to be looked for. At all events, there lay the irrepressible carcase, stiff and motionless, on the

tomb-top close by, covered by a piece of old sailcloth, which for some time nobody dared to remove.

I shall now, in conclusion, briefly relate the upshot of this series of adventures, leaving it to my readers' imagination to fill in the blanks. Something, at all events, had to be done to put an effectual stop to these alarming and uncomfortable visitations. Perhaps in these days cremation might have been suggested as the most effectual remedy; not that, after what had just occurred, even visible resolution into its primal elements would have been deemed by the Trimingham people a perfect assurance and guarantee against further disturbances. Any incarnation, even phœnix-like resurrection from mere dead ashes, might now indeed be looked for. Cremation, however, in those days was not on the tapis, and the proposal which in the first instance found the greatest measure of support was, that the corpse should be removed from consecrated ground—to which, indeed, it seemed to have a personal objection—and reinterred at the crossing of two roads, with a stake driven through it, as in the approved *régime* of suicides. This plan, however, was rejected mainly on the urgent

representations of the village carrier, whose daily and nightly duty it was to pass the designated spot ; " For," said he, " who knows but what I might find him some night or other pushed in at the back of my cart amongst my hampers and parcels ? " This was certainly a disquieting imagination, and more than one of the neighbouring farmers, whose wont also it was to pass along this road on their sleepy nags as they returned home after dark, sometimes rather the worse for ale and strong waters, supported the carrier in his decided objection to this plan. Finally, as it seemed doubtful if the land could be made to hold the dead sailor in sufficiently safe custody, it was determined to try if the other element, to which, indeed, the man himself had in his lifetime been mainly accustomed, might not prove a safer place of deposit.

The final act, then, was as follows :—it was decided to put the corpse in a sack well weighted with heavy flint stones, and, further, to bind it securely with a length of old iron chain-cable ; to take it in a boat three or four miles out into deep water, and pitch it into the sea. This plan was, in fact, duly carried out. Nothing more was ever seen or heard of the

dead sailor, and not the slightest clue was ever obtained to the why and wherefore of this great Trimingham mystery. Whether diabolic or human agency had been in question, the result, at all events, proved that the deep sea was alike too much for the devil and the dead sailor as for Dame Partington and her broom.

DON IGNACIO GIRON.

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I HAVE travelled a great deal in Spain. It is thirty years since I first made acquaintance with that country, and I have since visited and revisited it many times, making journeys of two or three months' duration through all parts of the land. In short, few people have ever more thoroughly explored the Peninsula, and as regards the special end and object of my voyages, the study of the national arts and antiquities, I may safely say no man will ever again see Spain as I have seen it. The beginnings of my explorations were before there were any railways, when the marvellous art-wealth of innumerable church treasures in every corner of the land was still comparatively intact, and before demolitions, restorations, and rebuildings had in any degree defaced or

vulgarized the great cities. Although the echoes of the great Napoleonic war had not yet died away, the land still slumbered in the full continuity of its mediæval torpor.

It is needless to say that travelling in Spain in those days was difficult, slow, and adventurous. At every step and stage of road and bridle path something might happen, the like of which could scarcely, in the common order of things, be expected to occur in any other civilized country; but the very hardships, dilemmas, and tribulations of the road gave a peculiar zest to such peregrinations. The mere moving about, indeed, under the glorious sun and in the dry hungry air was delightful. One of the most tiresome small miseries of the road in Spain in those days arose from the frequency of *fiestas* and *ferias*—saints' days and country fairs—when, on arriving tired and famished at some outlying village, the traveller would find every hole and corner occupied by peasants from neighbouring *pueblos*, not a bed to be had, nor food, the invading host having devoured every crust of bread and every egg long before his arrival. Spanish innkeepers on such occasions are apt

to be particularly surly and unaccommodating. Worried out of their lives by demands they are unable to meet, and getting very little in the way of remuneration from the simple country folk, they usually in such cases throw up the sponge in despair and sit down, cursing all mankind, and when a Spaniard fairly loses his temper, he is of all animals the most ill-conditioned, not to say even dangerous of approach.

Some five and twenty years ago, chance threw me within the radius of a very grand and notable "function." My journey from Madrid to Valladolid, by way of Segovia and Avila, had progressed to within a stage or two of the latter place, when I found to my disgust that the annual *fiesta* of Santa Teresa, the great local saint of Avila, was in full swing there and in all the country round. The result was disastrous. I had rows with two or three successive innkeepers, a misunderstanding with my own muleteers, and a sleepless night in an outhouse, with nothing but bread and sour wine to set out upon next morning. All this had fairly upset my temper, and some valedictory observations in reference to the obnoxious saint, which incau-

tiously slipped out of my mouth, well-nigh brought me to grief at the hands of an angry knot of loafers, who hung around at the moment of departure of my cavalcade. On arriving at Valladolid, I recounted this adventure to a Spanish gentleman whose acquaintance I made in the comfortable Posada de los reyes in that town, and it elicited from him the recital of a much more remarkable experience of a similar kind, which he said had happened to him in another part of Spain some years before. It is this story I am now going to relate, not my own adventure.

Don Ignacio Giron, such was the gentleman's name, was a fine specimen of a Castilian hidalgo, *Viejo y rancio*, of old lineage, a retired colonel in the army, and in every way a grave and credible person. I felt bound to believe his story; the very manner of his telling it carried conviction, and he did not seem a person of imaginative temperament. So serious and circumstantial was the recital, that it would have been an insult to him to have appeared to entertain even the slightest doubt as to the reality of the adventure. I will tell the story in the first person, and as nearly as I can in Don Ignacio's own words, and my readers

will then be in a position to form their own conclusions.

Thus, then, spoke this veracious Spaniard : "Your experience reminds me of an adventure that once happened to myself in another part of this benighted country. I have never been out of it, by the way, and I am in a degree proud of old Spain—that is to say, making you a low bow, I am a true Spaniard ; still, I know well enough we are a century at least behind the rest of mankind. Adam, as we say, came back to the world once upon a time, and everywhere he found things so altered that the poor man was utterly confused and bewildered, till at last he came to Spain ; then, as he said, he knew where he was in a moment, for there at least he found no change.

"My adventure took place in the vicinity of Jaen, in Andalusia. It is not necessary to say what took me there, nor why I was riding unaccompanied. My projected journey was not a long one—some sixty or seventy miles only. I took neither servant nor provisions with me, trusting to find all I wanted along the road, which was a fairly well frequented one for Spain. The first day's ride was pleasant and uneventful, but on arriving,

towards the evening of the second day, at the village where it was necessary for me to stop the night, I found prevailing a state of things similar to that which you recently encountered. A local *fiesta* had filled the place with country people from the mountains and villages around ; everything was eaten up and every room occupied, and the landlord of the *posada* was not in an accommodating frame of mind. The remains of a loaf fished out from the bottom of my *alforjas* and my own wine *bota* alone kept me from going quite supperless to bed, for there was absolutely neither bite nor sup left in the place. I say going to bed, but there was the difficulty. I am an old campaigner, however, and that matter did not distress me much. After some parleying with the sulky landlord, he informed me that he had an outlying house on the road, some two miles or so further on, in which he had put one or two mattresses and some straw and hay for horses, in view of the pressure which he foresaw would occur. Nobody, however, had been disposed to go out there, as the place was lonely and tenantless. If I liked to ride on, I could take up my quarters there by myself if I chose.

As there was nothing better to be done, I decided to do so.

“By the time I arrived at the place, it was well-nigh dark. The building was of moderate size, evidently very old, and it had seemingly been once a road-side *venta*, or wine-shop. The lower story, as usual, was one large room, with mangers all round for mules and horses, and there was a rickety open staircase in one corner leading to the story above. There I found three or four rooms with unglazed windows; in fact, the place was little better than a deserted shell. In one of the rooms stood a bedstead with maize-leaf mattress and a rug; in the others, mattresses and straw were spread out on the floor. There was water in the usual large earthen jars, and on the whole a brief survey showed me that matters might have been still worse. At all events, it was better to shake down here in peace and quietness than to take my chance of repose in some sty full of malodorous peasants in the village.

“Chopped straw, coarse hay, and water for my horse were sufficient for the poor beast’s simple wants, and he was very soon put in a condition of equine ease and comfort. My

saddle-bags and holsters contained my own travelling requisites, and these were soon transported to the upstair room with the standing bed. There I made immediate preparations for my own night's rest. I had not much fear of being disturbed ; but in Spain, as you know, it is always well to take all things into account, and in every district *rateros*, gypsies, and *mala gente* of one kind or other are often at hand to rob and even cut throats, if they only get sufficient notice and opportunity. There was no fastening, other than a rude wooden latch, to the door of the room ; the window was a mere hole in the wall, without either glass or shutter, at no great height from the ground outside, so that it would be easy to get access that way, as it would be, on the other hand, to jump out of it in case of need. All these things were taken into account and ran through my mind in a few seconds. I am not of a timorous nature, however, and I am a light sleeper, the slightest noise sufficing to arouse me ; moreover, I had a brace of excellent double-barrelled pistols in my holsters.

“On the whole, seeing I could take no effectual precautions against a surprise during

the night, I decided simply to lie down without undressing, and with my pistols loaded and adjusted for service laid out close at hand, to take my chance of a night's sleep. As I have intimated, there was no particular reason to anticipate any peril ; nevertheless, when I lay down, tired as I was, sleep would not come—fitful dozing only, disturbed by all kinds of fancies, and snatches of unpleasant dreams kept me restless for hours. Something I cannot describe, a presentiment of something wrong, a sense of fear and vague horror, seemed to have taken possession of me. The breaking dawn found me still wide awake, quite on the alert, and in full possession of all my faculties. Daylight is the best remedy for all such unquiet dreams, and for some little time I lay awake, resolutely determining to shake off the dark imaginings, close my eyes, and perforce go to sleep. Except for the occasional stamping and rustling of my horse in the room beneath, everything was calm and still. These noises, indeed, were normal and reassuring, showing, at all events, that nobody had stolen him. But in the midst of these reflections a sound, of the slightest indeed, yet

of a different nature, all at once caught my ear ; it was but a single 'crick' as of a tread on the rickety staircase, but it was enough. To say that I was unnaturally excited would be scarcely correct, but in a moment I seemed to grasp the situation. I heard somebody, and, indeed, somebody else (for the very next instant it became evident to me that there were at least two persons) coming slowly and stealthily upstairs. The first 'crick' of the stairs was followed by a slight warning 'hush ;' an interval of dead silence, and then the almost noiseless, yet to me quite audible—I had almost said visible—tread and rustling movement informed me that I had to deal with a couple of visitors. This fact, indeed, I gathered in an instant of time from a strange sort of clairvoyance, or mental vision, which most certainly I have never been favoured with since. That they were not honest visitors, benighted travellers like myself seeking repose, as, under the circumstances might very well have been the case, was also revealed to me in the same flash of inspiration. To get up, grasp my pistols ready at hand, and crouch down behind the bed was the work of a moment,

and I had not long to wait. The window was on the same side of the room as the bed, and just opposite to the entrance-door. By this time it was almost daylight, so that whoever entered could be fully seen from top to toe. Presently a stealthy finger was laid on the wooden door-latch ; a low muttered admonition to be careful, a slight 'click' as the latch went up with a jerk, and then dead silence again for some seconds, told me as plainly as possible that two persons were seeking to furtively enter the room without awaking me from my sleep—with what intent it required no strength of imagination to divine. Although highly strung, I was quite cool and collected. I had no intention of shooting innocent persons in a panic, but their behaviour in itself would soon resolve any doubt there might be as to the character and intentions of the visitors. Presently the door slowly opened, and I saw, standing in an attitude of momentary caution and suspense, the figure of a tall woman, peering into the room, and behind her another woman, eagerly looking over her shoulder. One or two stealthy cat-like steps brought them both into the room, and I saw that the first woman

carried in her arms something which looked like a large bag, or bolster, whilst the other had a sharp-pointed knife clutched firmly in her hand. As I have said, I could see everything most distinctly. Both the women were tall, gaunt harridans of middle age, dressed as ordinary peasants, yet, as it struck me, in a somewhat old-fashioned garb. But the evil countenances of the wretches I shall to my dying day never forget ; indeed, the horrible visages sometimes haunt me still in dreams. Deadly pale, as of animated corpses, their eyes staring wide open, yet with a fixed immovable glare, murder was written in every line and wrinkle. I observed that round each woman's bare neck there was a dark blue livid ring ; it looked, indeed, as if they had been half hanged already, and was certainly suggestive of the full carrying out of that operation. My mind, in any case, was instantly made up to send them both out of the world in a still more expeditious manner. I waited, however, to see what they would do, and their proceeding was very strange. Although they might see at a glance that the bed was vacant, they acted, nevertheless, just as if some unlucky victim lay slumbering in it. Good God ! had

I gone to sleep, where should I have been ? The how and when and manner of my imminent departure from this world were, indeed, the very next instant enacted before my eyes. The woman with the bag advanced a step or two, and, leaning over the bed, suddenly brought it down with all the force of her sinewy arms on the exact spot where my sleeping head must have reposed, and whilst she held it there with the whole weight of her bent body, at the same moment her companion plunged her gleaming knife three or four times with frantic violence as if into the heart of the imaginary sleeper.

“ I even heard, or imagined I heard, the dull thud of each stroke into human flesh and bone ; certainly the knife pierced not amidst the rustling maize leaves of the mattress. A low jeering laugh and a hellish giggle from the abominable pair followed the exploit.

“ It was enough. I rose up, and as I could almost touch them with the muzzle of my pistol, it was impossible to miss, and a couple of successive discharges, as I imagined, must have sent both these human fiends out of the world. Yet I neither heard them groan nor fall ; and to my utter astonishment and con-

sternation, when the smoke cleared away, there were no corpses, no women shot, and no other body to be murdered in the room but my own.

"I can scarcely describe my state of mind at this conjuncture. Was it a strange waking dream, a mere hideous imagination of somnambulism? For a moment I had a horrid misgiving of my own sanity. The thing, in truth, was enough to make any man doubt whether his senses were in their normal state. I stood for a moment dazed and uncertain; and then, I must confess, a great fear fell upon me. I scarcely dared to stir a step even to escape from the room. All was as silent as the grave again, within the house and without. Through the window could be seen a glorious prospect of heath and mountains and rocky glens, with the road at hand winding for miles ahead. The newly risen sun joyously gilded the clouds above, and checkered the earth with long shadows. There was a hum of insects and a twittering of birds, and the scent of wild flowers was borne in on the breeze which came through the open window. By that way at last I chose to make my exit, and I easily let

myself down, pistols in hand. With the first breath of fresh air outside, my courage revived, the spell was broken, and instantly any shadow of doubt as to the perfect witness and capacity of my own senses was dissipated : but there was a strange and unheard-of mystery to be solved. Armed as I was, there was not much risk in re-entering the house, and I resolved, at all events, to explore it minutely from top to bottom. A preliminary survey of the outside disclosed nothing fresh or suspicious ; it was, as I have stated, simply an abandoned, half-ruined, roadside venta of entirely normal type. Entering by the only access, the wide open door in front, I found my horse quietly standing on his litter, and not a vestige of anything else unusual in that lower story. At the foot of the staircase I listened attentively, but all above was silent. The rooms were entirely empty, with the exception of the mattresses and straw on the ground, which I had observed the night before, and which remained quite undisturbed. It was not, perhaps, without a momentary feeling of trepidation that I placed my finger on the wooden latch of the door of the chamber I had occupied, which most certainly, not long

before, had been handled upon a very different mission. Just beneath it a beam of bright sunlight was projected from a neatly drilled round hole through the door, and it was not difficult to divine that my pistol-bullet had done that. Intently as I listened before opening the door, not a breath or a groan could I hear—empty the room was and must be, as I well knew. Inside, the only additional evidence was another hole in the wall, made by my second bullet, which remained deeply embedded in the plaster. A single glance was sufficient to show that there were no corpses, no blood—not the slightest trace, in fact, of my abominable visitors. The matress on which I had lain was intact, as I have said, and the knife most certainly did not cut into its rustling maize leaves. This completed my survey of the house. There was evidently nothing more to be learnt, and nothing to be done but to gather up my belongings and get me gone as soon as possible.

“By the time I had saddled my horse it was well-nigh five o’clock, and I knew that the people in the village would be astir, so I decided to go back at once and have some

kind of explanation with the master of this questionable tenement. As I jogged along, however, it occurred to me that nobody would give credit to the astounding story I had to reveal, and that it would be well, in order to avoid possible complications, to proceed cautiously. Shooting at a couple of women, indeed, was not an everyday event, and it might at least necessitate explanations and entail delay in my journey. At the same time, I was naturally eager to learn all I could respecting the place of my adventure and the reputation, good or evil, as the case might be, attaching to it. The conviction, I must say, had forced itself on my mind that the occurrence was supernatural, and it is, at all events, reasonable to suppose that there must be a why and wherefore in the case, even of such uncommon events. In this instance it seemed to me that there must be some necessary connection, some *rappo*rt, either real or ghostly, requiring explanation, betwixt the place and the actors of the shadowy tragedy in which I myself had just played a part. Was this a case of persistent ghostly haunting of the scene of former horrible crimes, actually perpetrated in the flesh? This supposition, I

confess, took firm hold of my imagination, and I was certainly eager to find out if any such repute attached to the place.

"Spanish country innkeepers, however, are jealous and touchy in the extreme as to the good name of their establishments, and I well knew that a haunted *posada* or *venta* would, if the fact were once established and rooted in people's minds, stand very little chance of custom ever afterwards, for you well know what a superstitious people we Spaniards are. It was thus necessary to go cautiously to work even in fishing for information on this point.

"The landlord of the *posada* was up and about, and there was a great stir and confusion of departure of the overnight's crowd, and I found it difficult even to get a word in edge-ways, as the saying is. The landlord was still surly and ill-tempered, worried and rushing about on the important business of collecting his lawful dues from not too willing contributors on all sides. Probably my own pre-occupied manner and countenance when I accosted him put him on his guard, for at the very first hint of a desire for explanation as to the wherefore and habitual status of the

adjunct to his establishment where I had passed the night, the man's manner became rude and uncivil. He had no time and no inclination to give me any information about anything, and to pay my shot and take myself off as quickly as possible was the best I could do—this, indeed, was said in a manner so pointed and expressive that I saw at once there was something in the background. It was only by a great effort that I could keep my own temper, and in the end I could not help telling the man that something of a serious and very unusual nature had occurred, and that I must have an explanation. This, however, put him into a frantic rage. 'Lies, lies! it is all a pack of lies!' he cried. 'Get you gone; or, take my word for it, worse will happen to you.' This was said, as he somewhat cooled down, in a particularly marked manner, and when I threatened to remain and appeal to the *alcalde* of the village, he replied with a derisive laugh that if I did I might not perchance, after all, get off with a whole skin; he was not going to have his establishment libelled and traduced by anybody, and he snapped his fingers at *alcaldes* and travellers alike. 'Get you gone quietly,' at last he

said, 'and ask no questions here, for if you do you will only get yourself into trouble.'

"Seeing that there was nothing to be gleaned from the man himself, and that a disagreeable business and certain delay were in prospect, I at last reluctantly made up my mind to take his advice and go, trusting to pick up information further on along the road. By this time the ruffian had left me, and was squabbling with other customers. With some trouble I got a crust of bread, a copa of aguardiente, and a glass of water (with this meagre fare, as you know, we Spaniards often set off in the early morning by way of getting our stomachs in tune for a more substantial meal an hour or two later); I then took my departure, and I noticed that the innkeeper watched my progress down the road for some minutes, as if relieved to see me go. It was evident that my communication had had a great effect upon him, but that at the same time it was not an entirely unexpected or unprecedented one.

"My next halting-place was eight or ten miles further on, and there at least I fully expected to gather information respecting the astonishing matter of my preoccupation. But here again I was disappointed. The *padrone*

of the *posada* was a rough fellow of much the same type as his neighbour whom I had just quitted; indeed, it was evident that the two worthies were friends and allies. Although the man betrayed considerable interest and surprise when I broached the subject of my night's adventure, the tone of his remarks and comments thereupon was anything but cordial or sympathetic. He said that my story was altogether incredible, and, at any rate, calculated to bring discredit upon his neighbour's establishment and belongings; that for himself he never meddled with other people's affairs, nor gave heed to or repeated idle tales. He had, in short, no information whatever to give me, and finally the man added, in almost the same terms, and with evident emphasis and meaning, the recommendation to hold my tongue on the subject, and get out of the district as soon as possible.

“Now, this was very irritating, inasmuch as it was evident that there was some mystery, some general evil repute in all the country-side, attaching to the locality in question. It was useless, however, to press the man further; his demeanour was most uncivil, and there was nothing to be got by quarrelling with

him. Moreover, a few hours' further travelling would bring me to Jaen, where there would doubtless be less, if any, reticence in regard to so singular a matter, and where, at all events, I could, if necessary, take effective steps for its investigation.

"My further journey was continued with growing impatience, and so absorbing had the desire for information now become, that I scarcely lost a moment on arriving at the comfortable Parador de las Diligencias in Jaen, in summoning the landlord to a conference on the subject. At last I found in this worthy a respectable and reasonable man. At the first mention of the *venta* in question he was all attention. He immediately informed me that he knew all about the place, and that the strangest legends had long been afloat concerning it. When, however, I recounted my adventure minutely, as I have described it to you, the man's astonishment was unbounded. '*Madre de Dios Senor!* is this really true? It is astounding and incredible; and yet——' 'And yet,' I replied, 'I gather that you have heard all this, or something very like it, before. Look here, *Senor Posadero*, I am Don Ignacio Giron,

Conde de Lucena, Caballero de Santiago, and a colonel in her Majesty's service, and on my honour all this I have told you is true. Now, what do you know about the place and the people ?'

"There was no longer any hesitation or concealment. Briefly my host told me that the present keeper of the *posada* and *venta*, rude and uncivil as he had shown himself, was still an honest and respectable man ; but that in the *venta* he had the misfortune to have a notorious haunted house on his hands. All his endeavours to utilize the place had failed, and the vexation and loss the matter had entailed upon him had in itself completely soured the man's temper. 'Although,' he added, 'I have never before come in contact with any one actual witness of the supernatural appearances, I have heard endless stories all more or less of the same character as your present relation, and the supposed cause of them is well known. More than a century ago that particular *venta* was kept by two terrible women, sisters, and for years these wretches had, as it was ultimately discovered, murdered and robbed belated travellers who arrived unnoted

except by themselves, for they had no other person in their establishment. Finally their horrible proceedings were found out ; they were tried and garotted and burnt to ashes in the plaza at Jaen.' At this point my informant hesitated a little, and, in an apologetic manner, said he scarcely knew whether, considering my recent experience, he ought to tell me the current belief in regard to the apparition of these women, to people who had from time to time since slept in the *venta*. On my requesting him to keep nothing back, he said, ' Well, Senor Conde, if I must tell the entire truth, it has always been said the two women only make their appearance to persons who have themselves, at one time or other of their lives, committed murder, or who, at all events, have in some way or other taken human life.'

" The meaning of the reiterated recommendation of the two other innkeepers to take myself out of the neighbourhood, lest trouble should befall me, was now very evident. They had evidently come to the conclusion that I had murder on my conscience, and that even a gentle hint of their suspicions would, if necessary, suffice to send me away.

"Now, I am a military man, and in the course of our unfortunate civil wars I have more than once pointed a cannon with my own hands, and discharged a rifle; but God knows I never took life, if even then, otherwise than in honourable warfare. I am bound to suppose, however, that the shedding of blood, in no matter what manner or cause, sufficed to call up the lingering ghosts of these hideous harpies of old. Ghostly indeed is this particular neighbourhood if my host's other stories are to be credited, for he capped my relation, amongst other singular recitals, with one in particular so gruesome and ghastly in its nature that it impressed itself on my mind, and has since dwelt in it almost as strongly as my own authentic adventure. He said there was a village or small town not far from Jaen, now utterly ruined and abandoned, and that none could bear to live within miles of it even, and the cause occurred early in this century during the great war. It appears that a noted guerilla partisan on one occasion captured a French outpost of some fifty men, including the entire band of a regiment, with the bugles and drums and instruments of all kinds.

The poor wretches were all thrust into the underground story of the *carcel*, or village prison in question, and, as their comrades were known to be quickly advancing for their rescue, the savage guerilleras set fire to the prison above their heads and hastily retreated, leaving them to their fate. The Frenchmen, however, knowing their comrades were near at hand, began the most hideous concert with the musical instruments, striving to make the loudest noise possible to attract the attention of their friends, and for miles this ghastly concert sounded in the ears of their savage enemies, until at last the Frenchmen were all burnt or suffocated by the fire above them. Shortly after, he added, but too late, when the French arrived they burnt down every other building in the place, and it has remained in ruins ever since, for the ghostly concert is still ever and anon renewed, and the horrid rattling of drums and wild bugle-blasts may often be heard mingled with the howling winter winds which swept across the sierras in its neighbourhood."

Truly Spain is a haunted land, pre-eminent for battle, murder, and sudden death.

ST. MARGARET'S PEARLS.

ST. MARGARET'S PEARLS.

MISTRESS ANNE BOLEYN'S triumph over Queen Catherine, as everybody knows, was not of long duration. The scheming lady—handsome as she was false, and, as all the world said, a very harpy of rapacity—when she, a simple knight's daughter, became at last Queen of England, did not bear her honours meekly. King Henry's “sweetheart” had indeed fought her way upwards inch by inch, amidst a host of enemies. Good Catholics said she had bewitched the king, and so she had, with a fair face and a comely figure, a winning smile and a silver tongue, and brains withal ; for, whatever she was, everybody at least agreed that Anne Boleyn was no fool.

All Catholic England hated her because

she took up with the new opinions in religion. People said she did this because she saw how the wind was blowing with the man at whom she had set her cap ; but for this matter Anne Boleyn was no doubt shrewd enough to form her own conclusions, and had sense and spirit enough to stick to them from conviction. No wonder, then, that she became the firm ally of Master Thomas Cromwell, the king's astute and masterful chancellor, the man accursed of every saint in heaven, and by every honest man (so said the Catholics) on earth. Anne Boleyn, as they said, egged on the king and his chancellor to despoil and abolish the monasteries, simply for her own ends and purposes. Certain it is that, brief as was her day, much wealth, a goodly treasure of gold and precious jewels, found its way from the coffers of the Church to those of the crowned harlot, as she was in secret called. When the day of downfall came, and the heads of queen and chancellor in succession rolled upon the scaffold on Tower Hill, tongues were unloosed and innumerable were the stories told of their corrupt plunderings and collusions, to the Church's undoing and the king's majesty's prejudice. There hangs

a tale upon one of these pilferings too strange and romantic and too fateful to be forgotten. The echoes of the legend lingered long, though they are silent now. It matters not how and when the writer heard them, nor how he was able to piece together the disconnected links of the story.

In Hans Holbein's picture of Queen Anne Boleyn, a necklace of great pearls may be seen encircling the swanlike neck of the fair lady, with a golden letter B set with rubies pendent from it. This circlet King Henry himself fastened round his sweetheart's neck, and it was Master John of Antwerp, the court jeweller, Hans Holbein's friend, who had adjusted the pearls and fashioned the device.

But Mistress Anne herself well knew where these pearls came from, and it was by her secret prompting and contrivance that her royal lover had procured them. Better by far had she had nought to do with them, so people said, for just where these pearls fitted round her white neck, shortly after fell the fatal axe.

It is said that there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. Fishermen, nowadays, are strongly inclined to doubt the

truth of this old saying ; our story, at all events, incidentally bears reference to a very odd fish indeed—such an one as has very seldom, if ever since, appeared off the coast of the good old county of Norfolk, where was the scene of this eventful history. But touching this old saw, there is certainly one particular piece of evidence which inclines the writer to think that it no longer applies and that sea-things in general have really degenerated. This is the wonderful profusion of fine pearls in the olden times. If, for instance, old pictures are to be believed, pearls were formerly as big as marbles, and as plentiful as blackberries. Look at Queen Elizabeth, her innumerable dresses, ruffs, and stomachers were all strung over with thousands of fine pearls. Why, all the pearl oysters at the bottom of the sea in Cathay nowadays, would not yield such a crop. Therefore it is my belief that things have changed. Moreover, who has ever seen a mermaid in these modern days ? In what Museum will you find a mermaid's comb and mirror. But whoso doubts the former existence of these creatures, let him suspend his judgment till he has heard this story out.

Mistress Boleyn was of Norfolk lineage, and it is well known to this day that Norfolk people are a clannish race, and that Norfolk things and doings always loom very large in Norfolk eyes and estimations.

Now, these very pearls that Anne Boleyn wore strung round her neck, for one or two brief years of her glorious elevation, had been famous for a hundred years in the good county and, indeed, far and wide beyond its bounds. They were holy and sanctified pearls ; nothing less than the famous chaplet of our Lady Saint Margaret—pearls the very sight of which had been good for sore eyes for generations past. Saints in heaven ! what a monstrous wicked sinner, what an unscrupulous harpy, was this handsome Jezebel who had so openly annexed them ! After that nothing was sacred, nothing safe. No wonder, then, Saint Margaret's pearls wrought Anne Boleyn grief !

These famous pearls had been directly conveyed from their old and famous shrine, where a full century of worship and wonder had gathered round them a marvellous halo, to the neck of this Norfolk knight's daughter. The transfer was an outrage on the feelings of

an entire county, flagrantly indecent and in bad taste.

There is a little fishing village on the Norfolk coast, midway betwixt Yarmouth and Cromer, Hasborough by name, and on the outskirts of it may still be seen the grey ruins of an ancient priory, once a very notable and famous establishment. Bromholm Priory, indeed, was widely known, and its name was coupled with Walsingham and Glastonbury, Canterbury and Compostella, for it was a noted place of pilgrimage. Its holy arcana were two. Our Lady of Walsingham was in a sense unique, and yet oddly enough she was her own rival. Our Lady of Saragossa with her sacred pillar, for instance, was a thorn in her side, but there was but one Saint Margaret with a holy chaplet in the Christian world. Whether the other Bromholm treasure, a wonder-working rood, was of the same fashion as its famous compeer of Boxley, history has not recorded. Most probably not, for the latter had wires and clockwork inside, and its miraculous movements, in consequence, were a little monotonous and rather too frequent. I prefer to believe that all the Bromholm miracles were

bonâ fide. Nobody, at all events, ever cast any doubt on Saint Margaret's doings there, and we have high testimony, indeed, that her famous pearls were no shams. For centuries, in fact, one of the glories of Bromholm was a fine image of the virgin saint, carved in wood, cunningly painted and gilt. Nobody knew when it came to Bromholm or who made it. Amongst the devout, especially the women, there was a rooted belief, indeed, that it was fashioned up in heaven by angelic hands, and that it was delivered into this world bodily, like Moses' stone tablets of the law on Mount Sinai. Certain it is that the monks of Bromholm neither affirmed nor contradicted that belief, and a holy halo of mystery was gradually allowed to gather itself around the idol. When, indeed, the good saint, as holy and active in the wood as she had been in the flesh, took to healing all manner of ailments that earthly women and children in particular were subject to, and when fees and donations from rich and poor, gentle and simple, flowed into the priory coffers, was it to be expected that there should be any stiffnecked unbelief as to the reality of the wonderful cures amongst the monks of Bromholm? Far from

them any such impious thoughts. Has not our Lady of Lourdes in this full nineteenth century taken up again this healing mission, to the confounding of physicians in vain? A true womanly mission it is, a crown of glory this, of healing the sick and consoling the miserable—brighter the beauty, more lovely and becoming than any earthly grace.

Let there be no profane misgiving, then, about the Bromholm saint. Gentle and graceful was the virgin martyr! But she was as militant, also, as St. George himself, and even St. Michael of the great wings and shining armour was not a more redoubtable adversary of the devil and his friends than St. Margaret with her cross. Whoever saw her at Bromholm, as she stood proudly smiling, with the devil like a huge sweltering toad under her feet, a tall processional cross in her right hand, its sharp ferule driven deep into the monster's flesh,—whoever, I say, saw this could not have any doubt as to the power of the saint over all evil fiends, nor uncertainty as to whose aid to invoke in any strait or combat with the powers of darkness. Holy water, indeed, was not more utterly unbearable and odious to Satan

and his imps than St. Margaret's simple name invoked in faith.

But about the pearls; whence came they? From heaven also? On the contrary, there is reason to believe that they were actually a spoil of war won from Satan himself. Tradition relates with no uncertainty the actual *provenance*—to make use of a useful French term—of these famous pearls; their history, indeed, from the moment when they first emerged from the sea, is well known. We must go back a hundred years and more beyond Anne Boleyn's time for the origin of her fatal necklace. During all that time the pearls were a famous Bromholm relic, as germane to Saint Margaret and as veritable as the little finger-bone itself of the saint, which infinitely precious treasure also, was one of the glories of the monastery. Who had not heard of these holy pearls? Had not the saint's namesake, good Queen Margaret herself, come in pilgrimage to Bromholm with her semi-saintly son, young Edward, and had she not, as a special grace, been allowed to put the necklace round her son's neck, and had not her namesake of Burgundy even sent a special envoy to see if perchance these

wonderful pearls were purchasable with lucre of Flanders gold.

It was in Prior Bracondale's time, early in the fourteenth hundred after Christ, that, by a wonderful and special grace, the advent of these pearls shed so great a lustre on the Bromholm establishment. Till then this monastery had jogged on quietly enough, well to do, but undistinguished. Its lines were cast in a pleasant-enough place; its means were sufficient, if not ample, for the country round was rich and fertile. The Bromholm monks, indeed, had a revenue which but few such establishments elsewhere enjoyed. It was not necessary for them to use much labour and pains about their stews and fish-ponds, for they had the great fish-pond of the world—the sea, close at hand. It must not be forgotten that in the old monkish days fish-culture was an important business, much better understood and sedulously carried out in England then than it ever has been since.

Fridays and fast days and long Lent gave rise to a perennial demand for fish, and consequently to systematic and well-contrived measures for increasing the supply, on a scale

and with a universality which, the incentive cause having been lost sight of, often surprises the modern Englishman as he notes the vestiges of the old system in the ranges of great fish-ponds which still exist in the vicinity of the old abbeys and manor houses of the country. The Bromholm monks, however, had none of this care on their shoulders. Far better for them than the laborious culture of tasteless carp and tench, perch and jack, were the chances of the ever-generous salt water. Turbot and soles, whiting and haddock, and fresh cod, with oyster-sauce if needs were, lobsters and crabs—the entire harvest of the sea, in short, was theirs at command, and the Hasborough fishermen never failed to keep them well supplied. The monastery, indeed, had its own boats, nets, and tackle, and a stipendiary fisherman in its special service.

Whoever could have seen John Cley, the incumbent of this post, at the period of our story, would have made acquaintance with about as fine a specimen of a Norfolk county Englishman as there was in it. A bold bachelor and a merry was John Cley. With his oars and his nets, at fisticuffs and quarter-staff, with the trencher, the tankard, and the

wenches, John Cley was the champion declared of all the coast. A right good fellow, and popular with gentle and simple, John, however, had one failing, and it was notorious—he had left more than one maiden all forlorn. It would be little to say that John's morals were not of the strictest; perhaps, indeed, it would be more correct to state that he was not conscious of having any morals. John's peccadilloes were, indeed, too numerous; but it is a long time ago, and maidens' hearts were less easily broken then. When, however, John and the miller of Mundesley's wife, two sheepish boobies, had to stand up, *coram populo*, in the Priory Church one Sunday afternoon during service-time, whilst every text in the Bible, from King David's time downwards, was raked up against them by Father Thomas, the great preacher, people thought it was time that John Cley should have settled down and taken a wife of his own. But, unluckily, John could never make up his mind who to take. Since that culminating point in his career he had made a great many experiments, and at the very moment when this story requires John Cley's entrance on the scene, the sturdy fisherman was much

exercised in his mind as to the conflicting charms of Joan, the red-cheeked milkmaid, and the blacksmith's strapping daughter. John found himself thinking how happy he could be with either, were the other dear charmer away.

With sundry musings on this matter in his mind, John Cley, then, got up early one fine morning in the month of September, and pulled out to sea in his boat, to look after his lobster-pots and lines, laid over night. It was a glorious morning, for the sun shone just as brightly, and men's blood coursed as quickly through their veins, four hundred years ago as now. May not, indeed, the sun have shone even more brightly, for the world was a little younger then? At all events, let my readers figure to themselves as gleeful a look-out and a morn as exhilarating as ever sent the lark up carolling ashore, or the sea-gulls mewing and laughing as they skimmed the waves. Waves there were none, for the sea was as smooth as a mill-pond. A golden haze united sky and sea, blotting out the boundary line, and easier than by any Jacob's ladder scaling imagination might have pictured this a floating way to heaven.

John Cley was always jocund ; his five and thirty years sat lightly on him, and the scrapes he got into, if they sometimes put him into quandaries, never touched his conscience. On this particular morning, as he pulled out to sea with leisurely strokes, certain little entanglements touching Joan and the smith's daughter ran vaguely in his mind. Some slight mental preoccupation might have been inferred, indeed, from John's behaviour as he rowed. Starting with a merry troll, hummed in cadence to the measured splash of his oars, the ditty was now and anon suspended in a way which showed that there were opposing currents running in the singer's mind. That the intruding thoughts, however, were not of a specially gloomy nature, might have been inferred from the merry chuckle with which these intervals of reflection were brought to a close. A mile or two in the offing had been gained in this way ; the golden haze and the distance dimmed the Hasborough cottages, whilst it magnified the towers and gables of the Bromholm fane to cathedral dimensions. Starting again after one of these intervals, with a more vigorous ditty and a lustier pull at the

oars, the fisherman was suddenly surprised by hearing his tune taken up and echoed behind his back, but in a voice which, compared to his gruff puffings and snortings, was as the music of handbells. John turned him sharply round. He had heard no following oar-splashes ; who might the singer be? No angel from the skies surely, for the ditty was not at all of a holy character. The sight that met John Cley's eyes, as soon as he could see anything—for just as he turned, a dazzling flash of blinding sunlight struck across his face, blurring his vision for some seconds—was such as surely no mortal fisherman has ever seen since the days of Venus Anadyomene or Amphitrite and her nymphs. A ringing laugh saluted the bewildered mariner, as he gradually realized the personality of his pursuer. What, then, was the vision that met John Cley's wondering eyes? Not red-cheeked Joan nor Margie Smith, but a radiant creature whose charms, even to John Cley's untutored appreciation, at a single glance cast into the shade those of all the Joans and Margies in this mortal world. Straight upright, floating, riding, standing, sat, or stood, or swam, a fair mermaiden clad only with a

glorious cascade of splendid golden hair, yards long at least, for it floated all round her on the surface of the water, forming beautiful ripples and eddies—the fine gold setting to the jewel like drops of spray which splashed and sparkled around her as she moved. Imagine the mackerel's burnished green and silver, the glowing pink and scarlet of the mullet, bronze and gold, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, and topaz—the bright colours of all these mingled in a chameleon-like ever-changing sheen, and you will form some faint conception of the splendour of this miraculous damsel of the sea. John's wonder was only increased when, the last thrill of her merry laugh dying away, the maiden made a sudden dive in the sea, right under his boat, and came up on the other side, shaking her locks and laughing mischievously. John thought he had never seen a naughtier nor a more saucy-looking quean. In one hand she held a mirror, and in the other a comb, with which ever and anon she arranged her splendid tresses, and it was by this mirror she had cast the sunlight in his bewildered eyes.

John was fairly taken aback, somewhat

abashed, and slightly frightened. There was a spice of evil reputation attaching to mermaids, which, if the truth were known, perhaps had come down even from the Sirens of old. So John, much as he marvelled, and earnestly and admiringly as he gazed on this strange fish-maiden, did not at first feel any special promptings for further acquaintance with her. But the mermaid was not coy, and she evidently meant, "willy nilly," as John expressed it, to have something to say to him. Now, it would not have required any provocation on the part of mortal maiden in such a plight to have set John's inflammable heart on fire—but— And so John, after some seconds of undecisive cogitation, fairly declined the encounter, slewed his boat round, and rowed for very life towards the shore. But the mermaid was too quick for him. The very first stroke of his oars was responded to by a splash and a dash, a couple of strokes from the pair of ivory-white arms, aided by fins and tail under water, brought her alongside the boat in a moment. It was evident she could shoot ahead of him and around his boat as easily as the swiftest fish in the sea, or the lithest sea-mew circling round the crest of a

breaking wave. Up she came, after a plunge and a dive, just in front of the boat, with a ringing laugh on her pretty lips, and her lovely blue eyes twinkling with fun. She evidently considered that he would not be so ungallant as to run her down and row over her, even if he thought he could do it. Another twirl of the bright mirror, and a blinding flash of sunlight in John Cley's eyes, as at first, brought him to a standstill. John gave in at once this time ; the fish had hooked John, not John the fish. Although she spoke not a word, the mermaid's expressive gestures and blandishments clearly said to John Cley, "Come out to me, sweetheart!" True enough John's wont was willingly enough to go after the girls, and the mermaid seemed to know it, and John was a bold swimmer ; but—— "Nay, nay, lass ; come into my boat," said he at last ; but the mermaid only shook her golden locks and laughed the louder. John shook his head in turn ; there was a vein of prudence in him which forbade the taking such a plunge into the unknown. Very alluring was the mermaid, very enticing her expressive blandishments, but into the sea John would not go ; all and everything but that.

The mermaid tried every possible argument in dumb show, for she either could not or would not speak. At last she unclasped her necklace of pearls and dangled it before John's wondering eyes; and then, with a petulant gesture, she cast the precious chaplet rolling and rattling into the boat at John Cley's feet. "Lie you there, at all events," thought John, as he rested on his oars and tacitly accepted the gift. At this moment down went the mermaid, plunging fathoms deep, and something came up with a fearful fizzing and bubbling on the other side of the boat, lifting it all but clean out of the water with the sudden heave. John was well-nigh capsized, but he knew how to manage a boat, and, wildly as it swayed and rocked about, he managed to bring it steady again and keep the surging water out. "Tricksy jade!" thought he; "she nearly had me out." But a wild panic struck body and soul like a lightning-flash before he had time even to utter the reflection to himself. It was no mermaid which rose from the circling whirlpool which had so nearly engulfed the entranced mariner. A horrible and blatant monster reared itself from the hissing, bubbling waves with a reek

and stench of Hell. Satan himself, red hot and roaring, rose up and well-nigh carried off John Cley. Little time had he to realize that "the wages of sin is death," nor for thought to spurn away the glittering bauble at his feet. But was there to be no succour in this strait? "Holy Margaret, help! Help, good saint, help!" roared out John, in his sore need and agony. The devil is quick and strong, but the Name of God and His saints are as shield and armour to defend, and spears and arrows to the evil one. The virgin saint heard the cry over the sea even in her niche at Bromholm. Quick as thought, and doubtless on angel's wings invisibly conveyed, the saviour came. As when a harpoon pierces a whale, down came the sharp-shod cross of the virgin saint, deep into the noisome carcase of the blatant fiend, and John beheld his glorious deliverer standing all radiant on the monster, just as he had often beheld her in her holy fane ashore. Benignly triumphant, pitying yet severe, looked she down upon John Cley. From that poor sinner eager prayers would have poured out thick and fast if they had not stuck in his throat from mortal fear; but

saints know all men's hearts, and how frail and weak is mortal flesh. What immediately followed John Cley could never relate; apparently the fright and emotion in general of the astounding adventure he had gone through were too much even for him. Whether he was cast into a trancelike sleep by his celestial protector, or only simply swooned; at all events, he lay helpless for an hour or two, whilst his boat drifted here and there on the tranquil sea.

When John Cley awoke again and began to realize that what had happened to him was not a dream, but an actual escape from the very jaws of Hell, he was, for the time at all events, an altered man. Never had the carnal appetites of mortal sinner been so suddenly and completely quenched. The gross and boisterous mariner felt himself utterly frightened and abashed, and for a long time all he could do was to mumble out disjointed scraps of prayer and pious ejaculation, little understood shibboleths, but felt to be useful in emergency. By degrees, however, his scattered senses returned to him. It was no dream, for there in the bottom of the boat beneath his feet lay the Siren's

pearls. John's first impulse was to pitch the trinkets overboard, but touch them even he dare not. Presently, however, as he gazed at them in stupid irresolution, a sudden inspiration came into his mind, and doubtless it was a holy afflatus breathed from on high into this rough and newly fashioned vessel of grace. To whom was this treasure due but to the gracious saint who had helped him in his deadly strait. A voice even seemed to say to him, "Take up the chaplet to St. Margaret's shrine, witness of this day's miracle for all time to come." John obeyed the promptings. Briskly and quickly, as his strength returned, rowed he to the land. But who shall describe the effect of John Cley's wonderful communication on Prior Bracondale and the Bromholm community in general?

That a great miracle had been wrought none could contest, for was there not standing and irrefragable evidence of the fact? Where, indeed, gat John Cley these precious pearls worth a king's ransom, if not as he said? Mighty was the hubbub and rumour of this great miracle; it is little to say that all Norfolk was soon stirred up by it, and wild and won-

derful indeed were the varied versions of John Cley's legend, which obtained circulation on all hands. It boots not to detail all the circumstances which ensued upon the installation of this literally precious relic at Bromholm. Great were the rejoicings and infinite the ceremonies. To John Cley, though a simple fisherman, had a great mercy been vouchsafed. But was not St. Peter a fisherman? Certes John Cley was no saint, yet as a chosen vessel of grace a certain reflex of sanctity attached to him, and it was not meet that one so distinguished should be left in his former crass condition. So John, much to his surprise, was promoted from his humble status of lay brother to the full glory of monkery. A patch was bare-shaven in the midst of his curly red hair, and the monk's cowl and cassock replaced his fisherman's jacket and hose. But the cassock does not make the monk, and infinitely difficult and the work of long years was it to teach John to read his breviary. Understand it he never did. History says not whether the encounter with the mermaid was the last of his amorous adventures.

To Prior John Bracondale the great event

was indeed a godsend. Was not the choir rebuilt in his day? for offerings, donations and bequests soon poured in upon Bromholm. Carved in oak under every miserere in the choir, soon there were mermaids with combs and mirrors, and all manner of sea-monsters; whilst every gargoyle of the stone parapet outside was a different presentment of the foul fiend himself.

To Adam Newton, the master goldsmith of Norwich, was committed the task of making a grand silver reliquary to contain the famous pearls, and well and earnestly the expert craftsman laboured at his task—for the love of God and St. Margaret, indeed, rather than earthly profit, though men's applause, when his work was finished and exhibited on the altar at the foot of St. Margaret's image at Bromholm, was no slight gain to honest Adam.

Thus was this masterpiece described in the inventory of the spoilers when the fatal day of dissolution arrived at Bromholm: “One standing tabernacle, silver parcel guilt, cunningly wrought in bossed work; round the midst mermaids and all manner of fishes in the sea, green enamelled; on the lid, an

image of St. Margaret standing on the foul fiend." This fine piece of work Anne Boleyn also annexed when she secured its precious contents, and she sent it remorselessly to the melting-pot forthwith.

A GHOST'S REDEMPTION.

A GHOST'S REDEMPTION.

To the Countess of L—.

DEAR LADY L—,

I owe your Ladyship a thousand apologies for not having sooner completed the investigations concerning the haunted chamber which I undertook while at K—.

After all, I am sorry to say the chemical analysis has yielded no result. My German friend, who is really a very eminent man, and a great authority in respect of organic chemistry, poisonous substances, etc., could make nothing of the sedimentary contents of the phial. He reports that it was simply carbonaceous matter of seemingly innocuous character. He says, however, that poisonous substances exist of the most active and virulent kind which, being highly volatile in their nature, might have entirely evaporated from

the mixture in the opened bottle in the course of years, and have left no trace behind. The worst of it is that my friend has completely cleaned out the phial, being, as I suppose, anxious to secure as much of the sedimentary crust as possible to operate upon. I now send it back together with the lock of hair, and am much vexed that this should have occurred, for it has somewhat deprived the gruesome relic of its ghostly character.

As to the dear old lady's wonderful narrative, I have, as I promised, copied the papers and put the story into a consecutive and readable form, but, as I hope, without materially altering its style. I have, however, been rather ruthless in suppressing the garrulous reflections and digressions which interfered with the flow of the story, and so much weakened its effect. I will send the first part of my copy by next post, and the remainder shall follow very shortly. It is a pity that the account terminates rather abruptly, and that there is no record of what followed on the head of the final catastrophe. It is evident the writer had got rather tired of the undertaking, which, judging from the disjointed state of the original manuscript, she

seems to have carried on at intervals, perhaps lengthy ones ; at her age, too, poor old dear, she may herself have been taken to the land of spirits at short notice. Moreover, it occurs to me that she could scarcely have had any revelation as to what happened at K—— after the death of the ill-fated couple ; it would perhaps be taxing even ghosts hardly to expect them to tell all that occurred immediately after the dissolution of their fleshly tenements. I think, however, I have come upon a piece of evidence which may possibly lead to direct confirmation of this astounding, pitiful, incredible, yet in my heart I believe really true ghost-story. I told you I would look out the H——shire collections in the British Museum to see if any notice of the legend existed, and to my surprise and delight I think I have, as I have said, stumbled on a notice which I cannot but think is directly relevant and confirmatory. This, moreover, turned up in a very common book which I need scarcely have gone to the British Museum to consult—Oldbuck's "History of H——." In it I found a notice of the execution, in 1594, of one Alice Holte for witchcraft. She was, it appears first strangled and then burnt at the stake in

H—— market-place, and the scanty record adds she was a notorious witch, and is, moreover, known to have empoisoned many persons. Without doubt, this was the female Iago who wrought so much mischief. It would, of course, be most desirable to search the corporation records at H——. It is just possible that an account of this trial may still exist ; this, however, for future research. Meanwhile, with very kind regards to Lord L——,

I am, dear Lady L——,
Most truly yours,

J. C. R.

A NARRATIVE OF OCCURRENCES TOUCHING THE HAUNTED CHAM- BER AT K—.

PART I.

I WAS a very young woman when what I am going to relate occurred. I am now old, and very soon I must, in the course of nature, enter into my rest. I ought, perhaps, to have written this account when the events happened, but fifty years and more have not in the least dimmed the recollection or blunted the feelings of my heart touching the most strange passage of my earthly existence. I am writing for you, my children, and, please God, for your posterity.

I entered into this family an entire stranger, knowing but little, indeed next to nothing, of its history—that is to say, of those whose blood and whose immortal souls had mingled in the long past to the making of our kith and kin. Nevertheless, to me it was, (God in His goodness only knows why to me it was

so vouchsafed) in allying myself to a noble-hearted gentleman such as there are few in the world—and thanks be to God he is still spared!—to me, I say, it was vouchsafed to be brought face to face and to bear a part with the long-since dead of his race and lineage.

Maybe it was a fore-knowing by the spirits of the departed that my gratitude for the life-long happiness in store for me would know no bounds; that to all this family, past, present, and to come, my heart would be a perennial fountain of sympathy and love—a love that death, which must soon come to me, well I know, will not quench.

I was, I suppose, what people nowadays would call a "romantic" girl. I think I have always possessed a somewhat quicker imagination than most women, and I am, perhaps, somewhat self-willed; this, however, as it may be, but do not let it be thought that I say this in order to suggest any doubts as to the reality of the occurrence I am about to relate. It is in order to explain why I, a young girl of eighteen, on the occasion of my first coming under the roof which was to be my future home for life, should choose to insist on sleeping in the one skeleton closet

of the house—the haunted Beauchamp Chamber.

I had, however, heard much of this room, and a sort of fascination which I am at a loss to account for came over me respecting it ; in any case, I insisted on having my way, and to the affianced bride of the master of the house nothing could be denied. I came with my mother to visit my future husband's widowed mother, and I was to be married to the young Squire of K—— in about a month's time.

We arrived in the afternoon of a gloomy day ; it was the 2nd of November in the year 1711. I need scarcely say how happy we all were, and certainly, with the blazing fires in every hearth lighting up the welcome looks of every face, no place could look less ghostly than K——.

Everybody tried hard to dissuade me from thinking of sleeping in the haunted chamber, but, finding me quite resolved, I was in the end called a spoilt, wilful girl, and allowed to have my own way.

There was, indeed, nothing alarming or apparently uncomfortable about the chamber ; it was frequently occupied by guests, and its

aspect then was very much what it is now —a good-sized oak-panelled room, with a massive old bedstead with carved wooden tester and thick curtains. This antique piece of furniture, however, we have since replaced by a more modern bedstead, and perhaps that is almost the only change in the room from that time to the present.

I must now pass to another matter. I believe there are many persons besides myself who have all their lives possessed what is, nevertheless, certainly a remarkable faculty—that which, for want of a better name, I shall call mental vision. Such persons, whilst betwixt sleeping and waking, mostly in the early morning time, although their eyes are closed, often without the slightest warning see, or imagine they see, vivid presentments, the ghosts, it may be, of persons they have never beheld before, of whom they know nothing, and whom they certainly will never see in life. These visions come like lightning-flashes, endure for a few seconds, and gradually fade, often to be succeeded by others when the fit is on, so to speak. As I have said, they are beheld with closed eyes, as if projected on the surface of a dark mirror. For this reason,

perhaps, I never really look into a mirror in a dark room without some trepidation. These images are wonderfully real, and they move, gesticulate, and appear to talk, sometimes as if to themselves, and sometimes as if addressing other persons. So vivid are these phantoms in my case that if I had the gift of art, if I were a Hudson or a Reynolds, I could paint their portraits as truly as if from the life itself. I had often thought that there must be something supernatural in them, and that they were real visions of pre-existent souls, which by some strange power impress their ghostly existence, as it were, on the perceptive faculties of the seer. When you have heard my story out, you will be better able to judge of the reasonableness or the contrary of this impression. I mention this faculty of mine because, a few days before the time in question, I had experienced more than usually striking manifestations of it, and the impression had remained, as was not often the case, deeply fixed in my mind. Whilst at my own home only a few days before, on awaking in the morning, my closed eyes suddenly saw a vision of a young girl, her face and the upper part of her figure being very distinct, the lower part

shadowy and fading into nothingness. I cannot describe her dress, for her countenance was so intensely striking, so full of strange, earnest, pleading expression that I could take note of nothing else, but the impression on my mind remained that she was not of the present time, but of long ago. She seemed to be about my own age, beautiful but sad—oh, so sad and woe-begone that instinctively my heart bled for this mere phantom! She seemed to address me eagerly and earnestly ; I saw her lips move, but I heard no sound, and no meaning was conveyed to me. I thought she was making intense efforts to communicate something to me, but it was of no avail, and she appeared to shrink back crushed and despairing. But as she faded away she held up one hand and beckoned to me, looking at me earnestly and beseechingly, yet lovingly, and I felt a strange irresistible feeling of being drawn towards her. I opened my eyes and rose up in bed to go to her, but the vision was no more, and the full light of morning dissipated the illusion. Now, this was no dream, for all the time I was really awake. This vision, I say, made a deep impression on me. I must confess that my mind was filled with

the image of this ghostly young lady ; my fancy, indeed, had conjured up more than one imaginary legend about her, and my last thoughts, on composing myself to sleep in the Beauchamp Chamber, were of this phantom visitant.

I had slept some time (my slumbers were sweet, for the days and hours then were golden) when I was suddenly aroused by my name being called loudly, as I thought. I awoke instantly, and I solemnly aver that I was never more keenly alive to all about me. The fire had nearly burnt out, though there was still a flickering gleam from the embers ; but it wanted not that, for there was another light in the room. I saw—but it was not only what I saw, but what I felt or conceived in my mind in that brief awakening moment, which seemed a year. Had I dreamt it before? Most assuredly not ; yet I seemed to know instinctively, and I felt myself a party to and strangely mixed up in things very dreadful, and yet so grievous and sorrowful that the horror was as nothing to the pity they excited. I saw a young woman standing facing me, with one hand resting on one of the oak panels of the room, as if particularly

indicating the spot to me. This circumstance I particularly noted ; indeed, I understood instinctively its significance. Her eyes were bent on me, her pale face full of eager expectation ; hope, yet fear and bitter anguish were painted upon it. She seemed to be trying to speak to me, for her lips moved, though no sound came. Nevertheless, I knew what she said ; there was a spiritual communion betwixt us. At the first moment I was very much frightened, terrified, even panic-stricken. I essayed to scream, but could not utter a sound. It was the girl I had seen in my waking vision ! The next instant she moved forward, beseeching me with clasped hands, and oh ! so piteous and pleading was the appeal that a fascination came over me, and I yearned to help and succour her. I knew she was a dead woman, and yet it was a living soul I beheld and had converse with. I rose, but repelled her not ; she cast herself at my feet, but I raised her up and took her hand in mine.

She told me—and the telling seemed scarcely to take an instant of time—that she had waited wearily, wearily, from generation to generation, watching always for the

supreme moment of opportunity. This had been her Hell after death, this her awful punishment—that she waited pining to join another who came not to her nor could come, though his spirit wandered like her own, for ever yearning in vain. Annihilation, if the Almighty would so will it, would be welcome after one embrace, one mingling soul with soul with that loved one!

Of the secrets of the grave she had little to reveal. Disembodied spirits wandering on earth, she said, knew little more than the living of the Providence of God ; that they could never have direct communication with each other—this was part of their expiatory punishment. The weary solitude was a Hell unbearable, too terrible to relate, it might last for years or centuries or untold ages—who knew? But there was one way, one possible alleviation, one chance. “And oh!” she added, “repel me not now! Fear not! If there is love in your heart, if there is in the living world one soul dear to you, by the love you cherish, for Christ’s sake Who died for us all, help me, help me, for you are my only hope! Give me life again for one brief second only, and if you will it truly

and firmly you can impart again the vital spark to this dead tinder."

Strange to say, all fear was banished from my mind. She had touched the innermost chords of my existence; at that moment I would have given her, if I could, my heart's blood even. She read my thoughts. "If you grant my prayer," she said, "the power you possess you can impart to me, and if only for one brief instant even, I can call into being again the husband of my bosom; for the rest, God's Will be done! He is here waiting; do you not see him?"

I raised my eyes; there was another shadowy form, but I saw little, for my eyes were blinded with tears, and I was suffocating with emotion. I pressed her ghostly hand and gave consent. A burning thrill ascended to my heart and brain; it was such as angels may feel at the redemption of an erring soul. There was as if a movement of cold rushing air, hurried footsteps, and a wild, mingled cry of rapture, the sound of a passionate kiss, and all was silent as the grave!

I fell upon my bed, awestricken, dazed, but not affrighted or exhausted; and then I rose, and on my bended knees I prayed to

the Almighty to be merciful to these poor souls. The Lord has since been so merciful to me all my life that I feel assured my prayer was accepted at the throne of grace. I sought my bed and slept. That night was fully revealed to me the pitiful story which I have still to recount. It came to me in a dream, if it be so considered, though it was no dream in the ordinary sense, for my waking thoughts confirmed all, and added fresh details, as if from some unknown storehouse of memory not till then unlocked.

When my maid came and roused me in the morning it was broad day, and sunlight was streaming into the room. I raised my right hand to my eyes to screen them from the blinding rays ; there was a speck of blood in the centre of the palm, and when I washed it off I was aware of a slight scar or bluish mark as of a healed wound. That mark is still there, and I shall bear it to my dying day.

My husband, and you, my children, have often wondered how it is that I seemed to know so much about this house as it was in the olden time before the great changes and remodelling it underwent in the last century.

You have, indeed, often said jestingly that you thought I must have lived a previous life a hundred years or more ago. Can it be that, just as a single bud grafted on a growing stock mingles and imparts its life-sap to the whole growing tree, so my ghostly visitor communicated to me somewhat of her own individuality and knowledge of past events? I have thus often imagined that I was possessed by a spirit, just as it was at one time thought possible in Catholic countries, but not by an evil spirit. Poor dear gentle soul! when her head leant on my bosom she seemed to me like a fresh lily flower broken at the stem. In any case, I truly believe that this occurrence to some extent modified my entire life and character. I am well aware that I am a foolish, soft-hearted old woman; that every tear I behold shed by another has a respondent drop in my own eye; that I would give my head away if it were loose, has been thrown into my teeth times and often—especially by my dear husband. Well I know who in that case would be the first to buy it back!

I say, then, that I fully think I was possessed for a brief moment by the spirit of this

poor girl, for I can account for my knowledge of many strange things in no other way. How is it likely that I, simple, guileless woman as I am, and not even clever, as you all know, could by any possibility have imagined all this? Heaven knows, ever since, I have imagined little or nothing. I am, indeed, always on my guard against imaginations, for to my mind they imply exaggerations, and that means untruth, which is inspired by the father of lies, the devil. There was, then, perhaps some preordained power which enabled the spirit of this poor girl to effect a momentary union with my own, and so the actual personality and experience in life of a pre-existent human creature may have been momentarily transferred to me, never afterwards to be entirely shaken off and forgotten. Well I know even now that often, as I sit musing in the twilight, old memories not my own steal over me like soft music, mingled with painful stabs as if of a stricken conscience, to which, however, I plead not guilty.

During the night after the apparition, at all events, I seemed to have lived an entire life. Writing is irksome to me and difficult, for the words do not come; otherwise, I am

sure I could tell you endless things of a hundred and fifty years ago which would surprise you not a little. I must now, however, relate what actually happened the day after the occurrence in the haunted chamber. Before joining the family circle at breakfast, I went to my dear mother's chamber, and there, to her utter astonishment—I must, indeed, say almost to her consternation and displeasure—I told her my story. She thought I must have been under the influence of nightmare or some strange hallucination, and implored me not to say anything to my betrothed or to any member of the family till she could speak with my future husband's mother. The first question, however, at breakfast was whether I had seen the ghost? What could I say? I tried to evade the inquiry, but my constraint and confusion were only too evident. It became obvious to every one that something had happened to me, and I could withhold nothing from your father; concealment from him would have seemed a crime. Explanation, however, was for the moment avoided by my mother's help; and the further thought occurred to me, that the circumstantial story I had to tell, supposing

it really not an hallucination of my own brain, as to which I myself had no misgivings, would admit of corroboration in more ways than one. Moreover, as an honest, truthful person, it seemed to me that I should seek for evidence against myself even, if necessary. So fixed and certain, however, was my belief in the reality of all that had happened that I felt sure some corroboration of the matter would be forthcoming. Now, it will be recollected that my ghostly visitor, when my eyes first rested upon her, stood with her hand placed on one of the old panels on the walls of the room, as if to call my attention to that particular spot. I had, however, far stronger reasons for not overlooking this circumstance. Shortly after breakfast, your father, who had been distressed to find me apparently out of spirits, lost little time in asking me to tell him what really happened. I replied that I thought he had better accompany my mother and myself to the haunted chamber, where I had something to point out which might perchance bear strongly on what I had to tell him. No time was lost in going thither, and I indicated the particular panel which I wished to have examined.

Your father would have pulled the whole house down at my slightest wish, and to strip down the panelling of one room only would have been soon accomplished. This, however, was not necessary; the panel in question gave forth a hollow sound when struck quite different from the others, and it was apparently loose in its framing. Finally the secret was discovered, and it was found to be a movable sliding panel secured only by a catch, which a very slight pressure sufficed to undo. It disclosed a cavity in the wall made by the removal of several of the bricks. Within it was found exactly what I knew would be discovered—the little phial bottle and the lock of hair which have since been kept as relics in the family, and which you have seen. The astonishment of my mother and my future husband may well be conceived at this discovery. I pass over the endless explanations which ensued. It rests, however, now with me to relate the causes which led to the concealment of these objects, and it will involve the telling of a long and awful story. I have for years shrunk from recounting it; moreover, for reasons which you will easily understand, it was determined at the

time that it should not go out of our family circle. The servants, however, were aware that something unusual had happened, and hence the endless gossip about the ghost of the haunted Beauchamp Chamber, which for half a century past has, in a hundred varying shapes, been retailed throughout the country side. At last, however, I feel it incumbent on me to put the story on paper, in order that, pitiful as it is, the facts should not be needlessly distorted, and that justice should be rendered to the memory of the ill-fated actors in the sad tragedy.

M. L.

1764.

PART II.

THE L—s have been a knightly race for many centuries, and the head of the family in the reign of Queen Elizabeth was knighted by that great sovereign, when once upon a time she honoured K— with a visit. At the period in question, Sir Edward L— was a widower with two children. He had married his first wife when verging on middle age, and she died soon after in childbed, but the child, a daughter, survived. The knight

K

was scarcely more fortunate in his second marriage, for the second Lady L—— lived but a few years, and she had died not long before the events in question occurred. This marriage, however, gave him a son and heir, then a child of three or four years old. A fatality, indeed, seems to have hung over the L—— family at this period. Sir Edward had but one brother, much younger than himself. This gentleman had made an improvident marriage, and there had in consequence been a quarrel and a certain estrangement betwixt the brothers. The elder L—— had at that time not yet entered into the bonds of matrimony, and, but for this ill-advised step on his younger brother's part, probably he never would have done so. His brother's marriage, however, was in itself a powerful incentive to him. The knight was somewhat stern of temper and a proud man, and he could not brook the thought that the line of this ancient family should be continued through the blood of a petty tradesman's daughter—for such, in fact, although a beautiful girl and of a stronger nature than that of the man who wooed and won her, was the wife of Henry L——. Although our

family have had little to do with trade, and you, my children, can know scarcely anything about the matter, I am unable to see why there should be such great dislike to traders merely as such amongst country people of our class, or why such distinction should be made betwixt great and little tradesmen. Do we not see, for instance, rich merchants and goldsmiths, often by no means clever or well-bred people, settle down upon the land, and quickly ally their sons and daughters with the scions of the most ancient and noble families? Wealth, indeed, seems to me to be the most potent ennobler in this hollow world. Henry L—— had gentility enough, but of pecuniary means little or none, and it is scarcely necessary to say that his wife was penniless. Sir Edward L——, however, was not an ungenerous man, and, when his anger cooled, resigned himself to deal liberally with his brother. The latter, however, was of a headstrong temper, and he cast about him for some way of rendering himself independent of his brother's assistance ; "for," said he, "I will not eat the bread that, if my brother could, should be my wife's poison!" He was not long in finding a way. In the

city of London lived some distant connections of the family with whom a certain intercourse had always been kept up. One of these was a rich merchant trading to the Levant, and to him Henry L—— addressed himself.

In that quarter the young gentleman and his wife found a friend in their need. The good merchant had correspondents and a house of business at Genoa, and to that city it was soon arranged that Henry L—— and his wife should be sent out to settle, if needs be, and perhaps, in the long run, become partners in the common venture. By this time a child had come into the world, and Heaven knows how many more would have filled their quiver, if the young couple had ever set foot on Italian soil ; but this was not to be. The merchant freighted a goodly ship. Long and anxious were the preparations and consultations about the cargo out and the cargo back. English wool and broad cloths were to be changed into endless commodities—figs, raisins, and spices from the Levant ; velvets and silk stuffs from the Genoese and Florentine looms ; Venice glasses and Milanese swords and daggers. The good ship sailed at last, but fortune was not with

her. There was much and anxious waiting in Genoa and in London, but till the deep sea becomes dry land, no man will ever know whereabouts lie the white bones of Henry L—— and his wife on board that vessel. The child, a little girl, was left behind in the care of the merchant's wife, and the poor orphan found no lack of tender care and sympathy. Sir Edward L——'s estrangement was not proof against this sad conclusion ; the child was sent for, and duly installed and cared for at K——. The babe, in fact, was a not unimportant personage. Had it been of the other sex, the chances are that Sir Edward himself would never have married, and that, in spite of all things, the grandson of the saddler of S—— would have succeeded in his right to K—— and its broad acres. But the child, as I have said, was a girl, and it was too hard a measure to look forward to the blotting out of an ancient name and lineage in so inglorious a manner, and so the knight cast about him for a wife. The lady was forthcoming, and she brought her husband a goodly dower ; but her tenure was a brief one. She lived only long enough to introduce another member of the weaker sex

to the failing muster of the L—— family—an achievement, however, sufficient to blight the opening prospects of the lone babe who had so shortly before made its appearance in a weary world. Agnes L——, the brother's daughter, then was little more than three years older than the knight's daughter Mary, and the cousins were thenceforth brought up together. Sir Edward's second marriage some years after, as has been already intimated, brought forth a son and heir, and Mary, like her cousin before her, was taken down from her high estate as heiress presumptive. But there was this great difference in the worldly prospects of the two girls. Whereas Agnes L—— was penniless and entirely dependent on her uncle's kindness, his daughter Mary was rich in her own right, for her mother's not inconsiderable fortune was secured to her. Not all the gifts, however, were on her side. Providence sometimes gives wealth without health, grace, or beauty to one, and to another every inward and outward gift and poverty withal. So it was with these two girls.

It is time now to say something of another actor in the opening drama. This will be

as little as need be. Although more than a century has passed away, I feel I have no right to bring into question the honoured name of another family, the representatives of which are, moreover, our neighbours and friends. Reginald—— came into the world about the same time or a little before Agnes L——. His father and the knight of K—— were fast friends ; there was a great difference, nevertheless, in the worldly status of the two men. Sir Edward L—— was wealthy, but the Squire of —— was but ill provided with this world's gear. Master of an ancient entailed estate, but weighted with mortgages and encumbrances of all kinds, with brothers and sisters, and relations not a few, dependent upon him, the poor man eventually found himself with still more mouths to feed, for the paternal nest was soon filled with a younger brood, his own flesh and blood. In short, sons and daughters came as rapidly in this family as they had been sparingly given to the L——s. It is no wonder, then, that from the first Mary L——, with her mother's fortune in hand, was marked out in the good man's mind as the future wife of his eldest son—this same Reginald. Sir Edward L—— on his part

fully entered into his friend's views, for the alliance would have been on the whole a suitable one. The decrees of Providence, however, are inscrutable. "Man proposes, and God disposes;" old men and young men and young women often have strangely different thoughts and motives, and too often the passionate heart of youth will have naught to do with the prudent schemes of age. Had Mary L——'s mother, or even her stepmother, been spared, doubtless woman's instincts would have seen rocks ahead, and the handsome Agnes L—— would probably have been disposed of in such a way as to leave a clear course open for her less attractive cousin. As it was, the two gentlemen were unconscious of the danger. The cousins, as they grew up, indeed, developed characters as different as their outward appearance. Agnes, the elder, was affectionate and confiding, but somewhat impulsive and self-willed; Mary, reserved and reticent, of a weaker nature and a feebler frame. Nature had set no stamp of love upon her brow, and yet she was capable of nourishing deep and absorbing passion, but, alas! with little power of inspiring it in others. Notwithstanding

this difference of character, the more perhaps because of it, the childhood and early womanhood of the two were happily passed. They were as sisters affectionately attached and shared each other's secret thoughts. Reginald was for many years a frequent visitor and playmate, almost like a brother to the girls. He was a well-grown child, clearly likely to grow up a fine young gentleman. After a time his school days commenced in due course, and his childish intercourse with the two young ladies for a time came to an end. At sixteen the stripling was sent to Oxford, and two or three years afterwards he returned to the paternal roof an Adonis in looks and bearing, a generous but impetuous youth, his mind informed with some small smattering of the "humanities," to be quickly thrown to the winds as idle baggage, whilst horses, hounds and hawks, and the bright eyes of handsome girls soon alone ran in his mind. Mischief never to be repaired was done, long before Reginald's father confided to the young hopeful his plans and desires respecting Mary L——. Years before Reginald's heart had fixed itself upon her cousin Agnes, and the image of the handsome lad was enshrined as

deeply and strongly in the maiden's heart. Alas! for the same image was worshipped in another shrine. Mary L—— also worshipped him with a silent, passionate devotion. The still waters ran deep, but the waters of this love were silent on both sides. This was the one secret which neither of the girls confided to the other.

The communication which Reginald's father made to his son was, then, an unwelcome one to the latter. The prospect of care and perplexity loomed immediately large in his mind, for the foundations of trouble had been already laid. A year before, on one of his returns from the university, Reginald had declared his love to Agnes L——. The maiden's heart was already his own without the asking, and there ensued an overwhelming passion betwixt them, a passion that defied all human prudence. For this love Reginald would have gone forth a beggar from his father's house, and Agnes would have followed him barefooted to the end of the world. The things of this world repeat themselves strangely, yet naturally enough if one considers that the nature of men and women is ever the same. There was a time when Agnes L——'s father

and mother had stood to each other in much the same relation.

There were, nevertheless, cankerous misgivings in the maiden's heart. Her cousin's secret was more than guessed at, and would she not bring sorrow and lifelong disappointment to the companion of her childhood? All this soon began to loom in the future. Death itself, however, would have seemed preferable to the frustration of her passion, and there was no resistance possible. Reginald was already the absolute lord and master of her heart, and his will she would obey to the very death. There was a fatality in the matter. Many and anxious were the communings of the lovers as the trouble unfolded itself; the stolen interviews were difficult to bring about, and much contrivance had to be resorted to to avoid suspicion. But this long story must be cut short; it is too pitiful, and my heart bleeds as I recount it. Suspicion of their love, nevertheless, there was in more minds than one; it was a sharp-toothed serpent gnawing at Mary L——'s heart. The father's, too, had taken the alarm and a crisis was impending. Then a fateful resolution was taken. Man and wife no power could part, and, come what might,

Reginald and Agnes would marry, and, if needs be, set the world at defiance. "Married in haste," then, they were, but the time was not given them to "repent at leisure." This momentous business was not an easy thing to bring about, and the young people would probably have been betrayed by their effort to effect it but for an ally, to whose fatal assistance I must now allude. Moved by the devil, if ever a human being was directly inspired by the evil one, to work mischief in the world, was this detestable agent and worker of iniquity, and this agent was a woman! There lived at S—— one of those dangerous people who, in the darker and simpler times of our forefathers, were numerous and masterful in all countries. The race of "wise women," fortune-tellers, go-betweens, purveyors of illicit intelligence, charms, love-potions, and even still more dangerous wares, is even yet not entirely extinct; but at the period of our story there was a witch, or "wise woman," in almost every parish, looked at suspiciously and but little tolerated by the magistrates, parsons, and the better sort. Nevertheless, many a simple country squire, and oftener still squires' wives and daughters, had recourse to

the wise women rather than the doctor or the lawyer, whilst with the people of low degree there was complete faith in their powers. These women, in short, had an influence in the simpler social system of our ancestors which it is difficult for us even to adequately gauge and estimate.

The wise woman of S—— was a notable specimen of her class. Her unscrupulous cunning and astuteness were transcended only by a daring audacity of temper and demeanour, which bold men even scarcely dared to face, whilst it enabled her to deal with simple women as clay in her hands.

The young ladies of K—— were well known to her; she had supplied them with laces, knick-knacks, and cosmetics, for she dealt in many and various commodities. It had been her care to make herself gracious to them, with the indirect view of propitiating the knight himself. There was capital to be made if she could only worm herself into their secrets, and make herself indispensable, and unfortunately, by the time at which we have arrived, she knew a good deal more of their affairs than either of the girls suspected. Gossip and tittle-tattle came to her from serv-

ing maids and men, and already the case of Reginald and the two girls had been shrewdly divined and eagerly discussed by gossips not a few.

Reginald's family affairs and prospects, moreover, were well known to her. In short, little by little this woman succeeded in thrusting herself into a situation in which she saw a possible source of power and profit in the future.

When young and simple hearts are filled with the first real troubles and perplexities of the world, the merest word of sympathy may perchance induce a flood of revelations, fatal confidences never to be revoked ; so it was betwixt Agnes L—— and the wise woman. The tempter came to Eve, the bitter apple was seemingly made sweet, and the serpent triumphed. In the reptile mind of this bad woman there was, of course, but one dominant idea—that of promoting by any and every means her own vile ends. Should she stand by or betray the lovers ? Many and deep were her cogitations, and it was at first somewhat hard to see on which side lay the balance of advantage. Should she thwart them by betraying their secret to the knight

and the young man's father? There seemed but little to be gained by such a course, whilst it would entail the certainty of life-long enmity from the young people. On the other hand, by assisting the lovers a claim on their gratitude would be established, and by one means or other a hold over them might be obtained, which in the long run might be made a perennial source of profit to her. Nor was the devil, her master, slow to plant feasible suggestions in this woman's scheming brain. Her course, at all events, was now taken, recklessly and with shortsighted craft, it might be, for the wicked are always foolish, but boldly and without remorse. The project of secret marriage which the lovers had settled in their own minds had her instant approval and support. To the young man she represented that after all he was his father's heir, not to be disinherited, and bound in the course of nature to succeed to the patrimonial acres—that, bitter as might be the wrath and anger of his father, when the irrevocable step was taken, the storm would sooner or later blow over; whilst to the girl, every lying sophistry that unscrupulous cunning could devise was used to combat the misgivings

and objections which were seething in her bosom. It may well be imagined that the thought of playing false both to her uncle and cousin was very repugnant to Agnes L——, and, indeed, scarcely less so to her lover. Reginald's protestation, however, that, come what might, no earthly power should ever induce him to marry Mary L—— weighed with the love-stricken girl, and it needed but little of the wise woman's sophistry to weaken and overcome her scruples ; and so, as has been already intimated, passion and the tempter prevailed. Reginald and Agnes, then, were made man and wife.

How this was effected in a clandestine manner it is scarcely necessary to recount. The wise woman of S—— had many strings to her bow ; amongst her agents was a dissolute and degraded curate, dispossessed and needy, whose clerical character was, however, still unimpaired, and by him the infatuated couple were united in wedlock.

But, as has been intimated, she had still deeper designs ; her wickedness and cunning were exorbitant. In ignorant and low natures criminal audacity is often prone to be pushed

to an excess which defeats itself. At all events, the all-absorbing thought as to how she could best turn to her own advantage the situation in which she was already a leading actor, blinded this detestable woman to all consequences. Mary L—— was a stumbling-block in the way. If she could only be got rid of, many things might be made smooth. If the death even of the luckless maid could be secretly contrived and so brought about as to give this woman the ultimate power, if needs were, of imputing it to the lovers whose cause she was ostensibly serving, they could be made her slaves for ever. She had, however, no idea of openly proposing any such wickedness to the young couple, for she well knew that even the slightest suggestion of positive crime or dishonour would be hurled back with scorn and indignation by them. Her resources, however, were ample, and there was a way open which seemed a safe and certain one. As I have intimated, the one overmastering thought with the newly married couple was the effect which their union would have upon Mary L——. By this time they were well aware of the intensity of her love for Reginald. Many

and eager were the consultations with the wise woman on this subject. The latter, however, made light of their apprehensions, and, at first with hints and innuendoes, and at last more clearly, led them to understand that she had a remedy for that difficulty. If they would put trust in her and implicitly follow her directions, not only would she engage to put an end to Mary's hopeless passion, but even bring her round to be their friend and advocate. When anything is vehemently yearned for every straw is caught at, and the young people easily fell into the trap laid for them.

The woman told them that she had charms and potions so powerful that even the most ardent love could be overcome and turned, if needs be, to cold indifference or hatred. Having gone so far, to bring about this result would clearly be a mercy to Mary L—— herself, and the suggestion was eagerly listened to by the young people. It should be explained that all this had been debated and arranged before the marriage was actually effected, and on the evening of that day even, the plot, for such it was, was settled to be carried out. The diabolical woman told

Agnes that she would furnish her with a potion which she must find some means of administering to Mary L—— at her evening meal, and she did in effect give the girl a small phial containing a dark liquid. Her directions were to give Mary the potion, to take the phial, leaving it open and unstoppered, and to hide it in some safe place; furthermore, to obtain a lock of Mary's hair and bind it round the bottle. Other potent spells she herself would undertake. In measure as the dregs in the phial dried up or evaporated, so would Mary L——'s love for Reginald wane and pass away.

Agnes carried out to the letter the instructions she had received, and she hid away the phial in a secret place in her own bedroom. There was a horrible commotion that night, such as K—— knew not before since one stone was laid on another, and such as, thank God, it has never known since.

The wise woman of S—— did not underrate the efficacy of her potion, for it extinguished poor Mary L——'s love and life together. Perhaps it was not her intention to kill the poor girl outright, but to repeat the dose and take her off by slow degrees;

perhaps she miscalculated the strength of the potion.

I can tell little more of this sad story. The effect of the catastrophe on Agnes and Reginald was overwhelming. The young woman forthwith fled to her husband, and from her lips that night he learnt the fatal news. Murder, horrible and unnatural murder, seemed to their distracted minds to have set its mark upon them. Who would ever believe in their innocence when their entire story came out, as out it must forthwith come? Their minds were already unstrung, and a horrible blackness of utter despair settled down upon them like a funeral pall; it was the shadow of death which no ray of light seemed ever likely to penetrate.

O Heaven, where were thy angels of light? Were there none to comfort, none to breathe a whisper of hope into these forlorn hearts? None! The Almighty in His omniscience only knows. To me it seems hard to understand why the same Power which permitted these stricken souls to wander on earth for generations afterwards, should not have held out a staying hand just as the angel was commanded to stay the sharp knife

of Abraham. But the end had come, and there was none to witness, if not the spirit of evil, whose black suggestion and foul dis-honour drove them forth unto their doom. As it was, a deep rush-margined pool at the end of Knebworth lake was the bridal bed of Reginald and Agnes that night.

NOTE.—It is, perhaps, scarcely necessary to say that the circumstantial details given in the introductory letter which prefaces this story are entirely imaginary; no phial, no lock of hair, and no such family papers ever existed.

To the Earl and Countess of Lytton the writer's cordial thanks are due for their kind permission to make this story public.

J. C. R.

THE END.



